The Soviet-German War 1941-1945:

Myths and Realities: A Survey Essay

BY

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Expert on the Russo-German War

A Leading world expert on the Russo-German War. Colonel Glantz discusses the many aspects of the war that have been neglected.

* The current state of historiography and archival access,
* a brief sketch of the 40 percent of the war that has gone unreported,
* some of the ongoing controversies associated with the war,
* the legacies of the war on the current Russian psyche, and
* the need for more historians willing and able to work in the field.

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INTRODUCTION

Suddenly and without warning, early on the morning of 22 June 1941, over three million Axis forces lunged across the Soviet state border and commenced Hitler's infamous Operation Barbarossa. Spearheaded by four powerful panzer groups and protected by an impenetrable curtain of air support, the seemingly invincible Wehrmacht advanced from the Soviet Union's western borders to the immediate outskirts of Leningrad, Moscow, and Rostov in the shockingly brief period of less than six months. Faced with this sudden, deep, and relentless German advance, the Red Army and Soviet State were forced to fight desperately for their very survival.

The ensuing struggle, which encompassed a region totaling roughly 600,000 square miles, lasted for almost four years before the Red Army triumphantly raised the Soviet flag over the ruins of Hitler's Reich's Chancellery in Berlin in late April 1945. The Soviet Union's self-proclaimed "Great Patriotic War" was one of unprecedented brutality. It was a veritable "*Kulturkampf*," a war to the death between two cultures, which killed as many as 35 million Russian soldiers and civilians, almost 4 million German soldiers and countless German civilians, and inflicted unimaginable destruction and damage to the population and institutional infrastructure of most of central and eastern Europe.

By the time this deadly conflict ended on 9 May 1945, the Soviet Union and its Red Army had occupied and dominated the bulk of central and eastern Europe. Within three years after victory, an Iron Curtain descended across Europe that divided the continent into opposing camps for over 40 years. More important still, the searing effect of this terrible war on the Russian soul endured for generations, shaping the development of the postwar Soviet Union and, ultimately, contributing to its demise in 1991.

Despite its massive scale, scope, cost, and global impact, it is indeed ironic that much of the Soviet Union's Great Patriotic War remains obscure and imperfectly understood by Westerners and Russians alike. Worse still, this obscurity and misunderstanding has perverted the history of World War II overall by masking the Red Army's and Soviet State's contributions to ultimate Allied victory.

Those in the West who understand anything at all about the Soviet-German War regard it as a mysterious and brutal four-year struggle between Europe's most bitter political enemies and its largest and most formidable armies. During this struggle, the Wehrmacht and Red Army waged war over an incredibly wide expanse of territory, and the sheer size, physical complexity, and severe climatic conditions in the theater of war made the conflict appear to consist of a series of successive and seamless offensives punctuated by months of stagnant combat and periodic dramatic battles of immense scale such as the Battles of Moscow, Stalingrad, Kursk, Belorussia, and Berlin. The paucity of detailed information on the war available in the English language reinforces the natural American (and Western) penchant for viewing the Soviet-German War as a mere backdrop

for more dramatic and significant battles in western theaters, such as El Alamein, Salerno, Anzio, Normandy, and the Bulge.

This distorted layman's view of the war so prevalent in the West is understandable since most histories of the conflict have been and continue to be based largely on German sources, sources which routinely describe the war as a struggle against a faceless and formless enemy whose chief attributes were the immense size of its army and the limitlessness supply of expendable human resources. Therefore, only truly sensational events stand out from the pale mosaic of four years of combat.

Even those who are better informed about the details of the Soviet-German War share in these common misperceptions. While they know more about the major battles that occurred during the war and have read about others such as von Manstein's counterstroke in the Donbas and at Khar'kov, the fights in the Cherkassy Pocket and at Kamenets-Podolsk, the collapse of Army Group Center, and Soviet perfidy at the gates of Warsaw, the very terminology they use to describe these struggles is indicative of an understanding based primarily on German sources. More important, most laymen readers and historians alike lack sufficient knowledge and understanding of the Soviet-German War to fit it into the larger context of World War II and to understand its relative importance and regional and global significance.

Who then is at fault for promoting this unbalanced view of the war? Certainly Western historians who wrote about the war from only the German perspective share part of the blame. However, they argue with considerable justification that they did so because only German sources were available to them. Ethnocentrism, a force that conditions a people to appreciate only that which they have themselves experienced, has also helped produce this unbalanced view of the war; in fact, it has done so on both sides. Aside from these influences, the most important factor in the creation of the existing perverted view of the war is the collective failure of Soviet historians to provide Western (and Russian) readers and scholars with a credible account of the war. Ideology, political motivation, and shibboleths born of the Cold War have combined to inhibit the work and warp the perceptions of many Soviet historians.

While many Soviet studies of the war and wartime battles and operations are detailed, scholarly, and accurate as far as they go, they cover only what State officials permit them to cover and either skirt or ignore those facts and events considered embarrassing by the State. Unfortunately the most general works and those most accessible to Western audiences tend to be the most biased, the most highly politicized, and the least accurate. Until quite recently, official State organs routinely vetted even the most scholarly of these books for political and ideological reasons. Even now, 10 years after the fall of the Soviet Union, political pressure and limited archival access, prevents Russian historians from researching or revealing many events subject to censorship in the past.

These sad realities have undercut the credibility of Soviet (Russian) historical works (fairly or unfairly), permitted German historiography and interpretation to prevail, and, coincidentally, damaged the credibility of those few Western writers who have incorporated Soviet historical materials into their accounts of the war. These stark

historiographical realities also explain why, today, sensational, unfair, and wildly inaccurate accounts of certain aspects of the war so attract the Western reading public and why debates still rage concerning the war's direction and conduct.

Today, several formidable barriers continue to inhibit the exploitation of Soviet (Russian) sources and make a fundamental reassessment of the Soviet German War more difficult. These barriers include an ignorance of the scope of Soviet writing on the war, an inability to obtain and read what Soviet historians have written (the language barrier), and an unwillingness to accept what those historians have written. Of late, however, Western historians have begun to overcome first two barriers by publishing an increasing number of books that critically exploit the best Russian sources and test hem against German archival sources. By doing so they have lifted the veil on Soviet historiography and candidly and credibly displayed both its vast scope and its inherent strengths and weaknesses.

However, the third barrier, that of credibility, is far more formidable, and, hence, more difficult to overcome. To do so will require the combined efforts of both Western and Russian historians accompanied by an unfettering of the binds on Russian archival materials, a process that has only just begun. In short, the blinders and restrictions that inhibited the work of Soviet and Russian military historians must be recognized and eliminated. Only then can historians produce credible and sound histories of the war that accord the Soviet Union and the Red Army the credit they so richly deserve.

The intent of this paper is simple. It is to lift, however slightly, the veil of obscurity that has cloaked the war by addressing two major flaws in the historical record of the war, and to present a balanced assessment of the Soviet Union's relative contributions to Allied victory in the war. The first of these flaws relates to the "forgotten war," the fully 40 percent of wartime operations that, for various reasons, historians have deliberately forgotten, ignored, or simply covered up. The second flaw relates to a range of contentious questions that remain unanswered relating to wartime decision-making and the conduct of military operations, which continue to hinder a correct or full understanding of the true nature and impact of the war.

THE PARAMETERS OF THE SOVIET-GERMAN WAR

SCALE:

The scale of combat during the Soviet-German War was unprecedented in modern warfare both in terms of the width of the operational front and the depth of military operations (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Scale of Operations*

The Combat Front:

- Initial Barbarossa Front (total) – 1,720 miles (2,768 kilometers)
- Initial Barbarossa front (main) – 820 miles (1,320 kilometers)
- Maximum extent in 1942(total) – 1,900 miles (3,058 kilometers)
- Maximum extent in 1942 (main) – 1,275 miles (2,052 kilometers)

The Depth of German Advance:

- Barbarossa objectives (1941) – 1,050 miles (1,690 kilometers)
- Maximum extent (1941) – 760 miles (1,223 kilometers)
- Maximum extent (1942) – 1,075 miles (1,730 kilometers)

* These figures indicate length as the "crow flies." Actual length was about half again as long

Hitler's Barbarossa objectives were of gigantic proportion. Plan Barbarossa required *Wehrmacht* forces advance roughly 1,050 miles (1,690 kilometers) to secure objectives just short of the Ural Mountains, a depth equivalent in U.S. terms to the distance from the east coast to Kansas City, Missouri. To do so, in June 1941 the *Wehrmacht* deployed its forces for the attack against the Soviet Union along a 1,720-mile (2,768-kilometer) front extending from the Barents Sea in the north to the Black Sea in the south. In U.S. terms this was equivalent to the distance along its eastern coast from the northern border of Maine to the southern tip of Florida. Initially, the *Wehrmacht* concentrated its main thrusts in an 820-mile (1,320-kilometer) sector extending from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, which was equivalent to the distance from New York City to Jacksonville, Florida.

Even though the *Wehrmacht's* 1939 and 1940 campaigns in Poland and Western Europe in no way prepared it to cope with combat in the vast Eastern theater, German forces still performed prodigious feats during the first two years of the war. During its initial Barbarossa advance, for example, by early December 1941, *Wehrmacht* forces had advanced to the gates of Leningrad, Moscow, and Rostov, a distance of 760 miles (1,223 kilometers), which was equivalent to the distance from New York City to Springfield, Illinois. During Operation *Blau* [Blue], Hitler's offensive in the summer and fall of 1942,

German forces reached the Stalingrad and Caucasus region by October, a total depth of 1,075 miles (1,730 kilometers) into the Soviet Union. This was equivalent to the distance from the U.S. east coast to Topeka, Kansas. By this time, Germany's entire eastern front extended from the Barents Sea to the Caucasus Mountains, a distance of 1,900 miles (3,058 kilometers), which was equivalent to the distance from the mouth of the St. Lawrence River to the southern tip of Florida. At this time, the Germans and their Axis allies occupied contiguous positions along a front extending 1,275 miles (2,052 kilometers) from the Gulf of Finland west of Leningrad to the Caucasus Mountains, equivalent to the distance from Austin, Texas to the Canadian border.

At its greatest extent, the German advance in the Soviet Union (1,075 miles) was over 3 times greater than its 1939 advance in Poland (300 miles) and over twice as deep as its advance in the Low Countries and France during the 1940 campaign (500 miles). At the same time, the *Wehrmacht's* operational front in the East (1,900 miles) was over 6 times as large as its 1939 front in Poland (300 miles) and over 5 times larger than its 1940 front in the West (390 miles).

SCOPE:

Throughout the entire period from 22 June 1941 through 6 June 1944, Germany devoted its greatest strategic attention and the bulk of its military resources to action on its Eastern Front. During this period, Hitler maintained a force of almost 4 million German and other Axis troops in the East fighting against a Red Army force that rose in strength from under 3 million men in June 1941 to over 6 million in the summer of 1944. While over 80 percent of the *Wehrmacht* fought in the East during 1941 and 1942, over 60 percent continued to do so in 1943 and 1944 (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Scope of Operations

	AXIS FORCES	**RED ARMY FORCES**
June 1941:	3,767,000	2,680,000 (in theater)
	3,117,000 (German)	5,500,000 (overall)
	900,000 (in the west)	
June 1942:	3,720,000	5,313,000
	2,690,000 (German)	
	80 % in the East	
July 1943:	3,933,000	6,724,000
	3,483,000 (German)	
	63 % in the East	
June 1944	3,370,000	6,425,000
	2,520,000 (German)	
	62 % in the East	
Jan. 1945	2,330,000	6,532,000
	2,230,000 (German)	
	60 % in the East	
April 1945	1,960,000	6,410,000
Total Mobilized		**34,476,700**

In January 1945 the Axis fielded over 2.3 million men, including 60 percent of the *Wehrmacht's* forces and the forces of virtually all of its remaining allies, against the Red Army, which had a field-strength of 6.5 million soldiers. In the course of the ensuing winter campaign, the *Wehrmacht* suffered 500,000 losses in the East against 325,000 in the West. By April 1945, 1,960,000 German troops faced the 6.4 million Red Army troops at the gates of Berlin, in Czechoslovakia, and in numerous isolated pockets to the east, while 4 million Allied forces in western Germany faced under 1 million *Wehrmacht* soldiers. In May 1945 the Soviets accepted the surrender of almost 1.5 million German soldiers, while almost 1 million more fortunate Germans soldiers surrendered to the British and Americans, including many who fled west to escape the dreaded Red Army.

COURSE:

The Soviet-German War lasted from 22 June 1941 through 9 May 1945, a period slightly less than four years. On the basis of postwar study and analysis of the war, Soviet (Russian) military theorists and historians have subdivided the overall conflict into three distinct periods, each distinguished from one another by the strategic nature of military operations and the fortunes of war. In turn, the Soviets subdivided each wartime period into several campaigns, each of which occurred during one or more seasons of the year (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. The Periods of War

The 1st Period of the War (22 Jun. 1941-18 Nov. 1942)

(Germany Holds the Strategic Initiative)

- The Summer-Fall Campaign (22 June-December 1941)
- The Winter Campaign (December 1941-April 1942)
- The Summer-Fall Campaign (May-October 1942)

The 2nd Period of the War (19 Nov. 1942-31 Dec. 1943)

(A Period of Transition)

- The Winter Campaign (November 1942-March 1943)
- The Summer-Fall Campaign (June-December 1943)

The 3rd Period of the War (1944-1945)

(The Soviet Union Holds the Strategic Initiative)

- The Winter Campaign (December 1943-April 1944)
- The Summer-Fall Campaign (June-December 1944)
- The Winter Campaign (January-March 1945)
- The Spring Campaign (April-May 1945)

Postscript: The Manchurian Offensive (August 1945)

According to this construct, the **1st Period of the War** lasted from Hitler's Barbarossa invasion on 22 June 1941 through 18 November 1942, the day German offensive operations toward Stalingrad ended. This period encompasses Hitler's two most famous and spectacular strategic offensives, Operation Barbarossa in 1941 and Operation *Blau* [Blue] in 1942. Although the Red Army was able to halt the German advances on Moscow, Leningrad, and Moscow in December 1941 and conduct major offensives of its own during the winter of 1942 and 1943, throughout this period the strategic initiative remained predominantly in German hands. During this period, the *Wehrmacht's* tactical and operational military skills far exceeded those of the Red Army, and the rigors of incessant combat, the vastness of the theater of military operations, and the harshness of the climate had not yet significantly dulled the cutting edge of German military power.

During the 1st period of the war, the virtual destruction of its pre-war army and military force structure forced the Soviets to resort to a simpler and more fragile force structure while it educated its military leaders and developed a new force structure that could compete effectively with its more experienced foe. Despite the Red Army's travails, during this period it was able to produce one of the first turning points of the war in the winter of 1941 and 1942. In short, the Red Army's Moscow counteroffensive in December 1941 and its subsequent winter offensive in January and February 1942 defeated Operation Barbarossa and insured that Germany could no longer win the war.

The **2nd Period of the War** lasted from the commencement of the Red Army's Stalingrad counteroffensive on 19 November 1942 to the Red Army's penetration of German defenses along the Dnepr River and invasion of Belorussia and the Ukraine in December 1943. Defined as a transitional period during which the strategic initiative shifted inexorably and irrevocably into the Red Army's hands, this was the most important period of the war in terms of the struggle's ultimate outcome. During this period and in near constant combat, the Red Army restructured itself into a modern army that could more effectively engage and, ultimately, defeat *Wehrmacht* forces.

The winter campaign began with the Red Army's massive offensives at Rzhev (Operation Mars) and Stalingrad (Operation Uranus) in mid-November 1942 and ended with the surrender of German Sixth Army at Stalingrad and massive Red Army offensives along virtually the entire expanse of the German Eastern Front. Although the Red Army fell short of fulfilling Stalin's ambitious objectives, the winter campaign represented the second and most important turning point in the war. After its Stalingrad defeat, it was clear that Germany would loss the war. Only the scope and terms of that defeat remained to be determined.

The Red Army's ensuing summer-fall campaign of 1943 produced the third major turning point of the war. After its defeat in the Battle of Kursk, it was clear that German defeat would be total. Only the time and costs necessary to effect that defeat remained to be determined.

During the **3rd Period of the War** (1944-1945), the Soviet Union held the strategic initiative. The ensuing campaigns from December 1943 through May 1945 were almost continuous, punctuated only by brief pauses while the Soviet war machine gathered itself for another major offensive. This period witnessed an unalterable decline in German military strength and fortunes and the final maturity of the Red Army in terms of structure and combat techniques. After Kursk the strength and combat effectiveness of the German armies in the East entered a period of almost constant decline. Although periodic influxes of new conscripts and equipment accorded the defending Germans the means to conduct local counterattacks and counterstrokes, these attacks were steadily less effective, both because of the growing sophistication of the Soviet troops and because of the steady decay in the level of German training and effectiveness.

Conversely, the sophistication of Red Army offensive operations grew as it undertook simultaneous and often consecutive offensive across the entire combat front. During the winter campaign of 1943-1944 Red Army forces launched major offensives simultaneously in the Leningrad region, Belorussia, the Ukraine, and the Crimea. Although the Belorussian offensive faltered short of its goals, Red Army forces cleared German defenders from most of southern Leningrad region, from the Ukraine westward to the Polish and Rumanian borders, and from the Crimean peninsula.

During the summer-fall campaign of 1944 the Red Army conducted strategic offensives successively against German army groups defending Belorussia, southern Poland, and Rumania and the Balkans. By early December 1944, these offensives encompassed the entire combat front from the Baltic region to Budapest, Hungary and Belgrade, Yugoslavia. During the ensuing winter campaign of 1945 Red Army forces smashed German defenses in Poland and western Hungary and reached the Oder River only 36 miles from Berlin and Vienna, Austria. The Red Army capped its successes in this final period of war by mounting its Berlin and Prague offensives, which marked the destruction of Hitler's Third Reich, in April and May 1945.

As a virtual postscript to its victory over Nazi Germany, at the United States' request, the Red Army deployed almost 1 million men to the Far East and, in August 1945, destroyed the Japanese Kwantung Army in Manchuria, helping hasten the end of the war in the Pacific.

COST:

Although exact numbers can never be established, its Great Patriotic War with Nazi Germany and the Japanese Empire cost the Soviet Union about 14.7 million military dead, half again as many men as the United States fielded in the entire war effort and more than 30 times the 375,000 dead the United States suffered in the war. Overall, the Red Army, Navy, and NKVD suffered at least 29 million and perhaps as many as 35 million military casualties (see Figure 4)

Figure 4. Red Army Wartime Casualties

RED ARMY CASUALTIES

	Total	Killed, Missing, or Captured
1941	4,308,094	2,993,803
1942	7,080,801	2,993,536
1943	7,483,647	1,977,127
1944	6,503,204	1,412,335
1945	2,823,381	631,633
Official Total	28,199,127	10,008,434
Armed Forces	29,629,205	1,285,057 (38.1 % of the total)
Actual	35,000,000	14,700,000 (42 %) of the total)

Although incalculable, the civilian death toll was even more staggering, probably reaching the grim figure of another 20 million souls. In addition, the dislocation of the Soviet Union's wartime population was catastrophic, comparable to enemy occupation of the United States from the Atlantic coast to well beyond the Mississippi River. While countless millions of Soviet soldiers and civilians disappeared into German detention camps and slave labor factories, millions more suffered permanent physical and mental damage. As unimaginable as it may be, the total Soviet human losses amounted to as many as 35 million dead and an equal number of maimed.

Economic dislocation was equally severe. Despite the prodigious feats the Soviets accomplished in moving their productive capability deep within the Soviet Union and east of the Urals and building a new industrial base in the Urals region and Siberia, the losses in resources and manufacturing capacity in western Russia and Ukraine were catastrophic. The heavy industry of the Donbas, Leningrad, Kiev, Khar'kov, and a host of regions fell under German control along with key mineral resource deposits and most of the Soviet Union's prime agricultural regions. The degree of damage to the Soviet Union's economy and military productive capability caused by the German invasion was equivalent to the amount of damage the United States would have suffered if an invading power conquered the entire region from the east coast across the Mississippi River into the eastern Great Plains. This stark context underscores the importance of Lend-Lease shipments and explains why the words "Villies," "Studabaker," "Duglass," and "Spam" remain familiar terms to middle-aged and older Russians.

Nor did Germany escape the carnage it wrought by beginning the war (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. German Wartime Losses

GERMAN PERMANENT LOSSES IN THE EAST
(Dead, missing, or disabled)

September 1939- 1 September 1942	922,000 (Over 90 % in the East)
1 September 1942- 20 November 1943	2,077,000 (Over 90 % in the East)
20 November 1943- June 1944	1,500,000 est. (80 % in the East)
June-November 1944	1,457,000 (903,000 or 62 % in the East)
30 December 1944- 30 April 1945	2,000,000 (67 % in the East)
	=====
Total Losses to 30 April 1945	11,135,500 3,888,000 dead 3,035,700 captured
	=====
Total Armed Forces Losses	**13,488,000** 10,758,000 (80 % in the East

From September 1939 to September 1942, the bulk of the German Army's 922,000 dead, missing, and disabled (14% of Germany's total armed force) could be credited to combat in the East. Between 1 September 1942 and 20 November 1943, this grim toll rose to 2,077,000 (30% of Germany's total armed force), again primarily in the East. After the opening of the "second front" in Normandy, the *Wehrmacht* suffered another 1,457,000 irrevocable losses (dead, missing, or captured) from June through November 1944. Of this number, it suffered 903,000 (62% of the total losses) of these losses in the East. Finally, after losing 120,000 men to the Allies in the Battle of the Bulge, from 1 January to 30 April 1945, the *Wehrmacht* suffered another 2 million losses, two-thirds of which fell victim to the Red Army. Today, the stark inscriptions "Died in the East," which are carved on countless thousands of headstones in scores of German cemeteries bear mute witness to the carnage in the East, where the will and strength of the *Wehrmacht* perished.

In addition, Germany's allies also suffered mightily, losing almost 2 million men in less than four years of war (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. The Wartime Losses of Germany's Axis Allies

THE LOSSES OF OTHER AXIS COUNTRIES

	Dead and Missing	POWs	Total
Hungary	350,000	513,700	863,700
Italy	45,000	48,900	93,900
Rumania	480,000	210,800	681,800
Finland	84,000	2,400	86,400
Total	**959,000**	**766,800**	**1,725,000**

This grim toll brought total Axis losses in the Soviet-German War to the gruesome figure of 12,483,000 soldiers killed, missing, captured, or permanently disabled.

IMPACT:

During its Great Patriotic War, the Red Army defeated the Twentieth Century's most formidable armed force after suffering the equivalent of what the Soviets later described as the effects of an atomic war. By virtue of the Red Army's four-year struggle, Hitler's Third Reich, which was supposed to last for 1,000 years, perished in only 12 years, and Nazi domination of Europe ended. By war's end, the Red Army had emerged as the world's premier killing machine. Tragically, however, this killing machine proved as deadly for the Red Army's soldiers as it did for those serving the Axis powers. After war's end and by virtue of its performance in the war, the Soviet Union quickly emerged as the dominant power in Eurasia and one of the world's two super-powers.

The enormously sophisticated war-fighting capability that the Red Army forged in war and the international stature the Soviet Union achieved after war's end redounded to the credit not only of Stalin but also of his entire government. The German invasion gave the Communist regime an unprecedented legitimacy as the organizer of victory. Men and women who had been apathetic about that regime could not avoid physical and emotional involvement in the struggle against the invader. By emphasizing patriotism rather than Marxist purity, the Communists identified themselves with the survival of the entire nation. In the process, soldiers found it much easier to obtain membership in the Communist Party and in the *Komsomol* [Young Communist League], giving the Communists a more pervasive, if less obtrusive, hold on the Army and the entire country. During and even after the war, virtually the entire Soviet population was united by the drive to expel the Germans and the determination to prevent any repetition of the horrors of 1941-42.

Yet after the war ended, in some sense, the Soviets became prisoners of their own success and hostage to present and future fears generated by their past horrors, trials, and tribulations. Clearly the war had a searing effect on the Russian psyche, an effect that ultimately contributed to the demise of the Soviet State. Shortly after war's end, a new slogan emerged that dominated the Soviet psyche for over 40 years. It declared:

“НИКТО НЕ ЗАБЫТ НИЧТО НЕ ЗАБЫТО”
(“NO-ONE IS FORGETTEN, NOTHING IS FORGOTTEN”

Although the Red (now Soviet) Army was scaled back after war’s end, it still occupied pride of place in the Soviet government, and all postwar Soviet leaders struggled to limit both the political and the budgetary impact of the defense forces. The Soviet economy, already stunted by its wartime experiences, was forced to allocate its most valuable resources to defense.

More generally, the German invasion had reinforced the traditional and justified Russian fear of invasion. The Great Patriotic War, with its devastation and suffering, colored the strategic thinking of an entire generation of Soviet leaders. Postwar Soviet governments created an elaborate system of buffer and client states, designed to insulate the Soviet Union from any possible attack. Although the Warsaw Pact countries contributed to Soviet defense and to the Soviet economy, their rebellious populations were a recurring threat to the regime's sense of security. Outposts such as Cuba and Vietnam might appear to be useful gambits in the Cold War struggle with the West, but these outposts represented further drains on the Soviet economy. In the long run, the Soviet government probably lost as much as it gained from the buffer and client states.

In retrospect, therefore, the determination to preserve the fruits of victory and preclude any future attack was a dangerous burden for the Moscow government. This determination, accompanied by huge military spending and ill-conceived foreign commitments, was a permanent handicap that helped doom the Soviet economy and with it the Soviet State.

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FORGOTTEN BATTLES AND HISTORICAL DEBATES: THE 1st PERIOD OF THE WAR

THE SUMMER-FALL CAMPAIGN, 22 JUNE-5 DECEMBER 1941

CONTEXT:

A COMPARATIVE CHRONOLOGY OF OPERATIONS ON THE EASTERN AND WESTERN FRONTS DURING THE SUMMER-FALL CAMPAIGN OF 1941

- **In June 1941 the United States was at peace, and, in October, the Congress renewed the draft by a single vote. U.S. Army strength reached 1.5 million men.**
- **On 22 June 1941 Hitler's *Wehrmacht* invaded the Soviet Union with a force of over 3 million men, crushed Red Army forces in the border region, and raced inexorably forward toward Leningrad, Moscow, and Kiev, leaving a shattered Red Army in its wake.**

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- **The 5.5-million man Red Army lost at least 2.8 million men by 1 October and 1.6 million more by 31 December. During this period the Red Army raised 821 division equivalents (483 rifle, 73 tank, 31 mechanized, and 101 cavalry divisions and 266 rifle, tank, and ski brigades) and lost a total of 229 division equivalents.**

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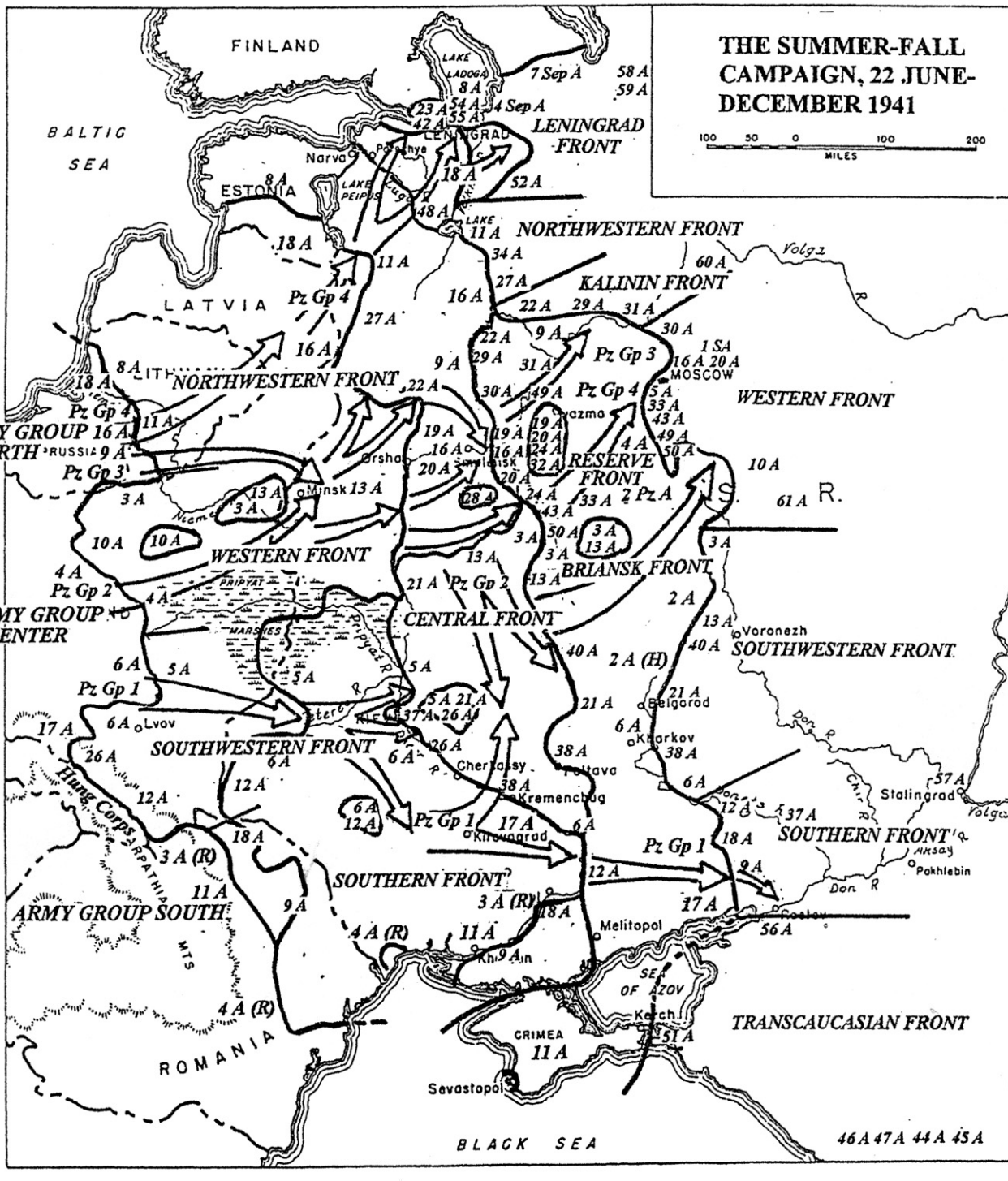
- **In October 1941 Stalin evacuated the bulk of the Soviet government to Kuibyshev and in November the *Wehrmacht* began its final advance on Moscow.**
- **In November 1941 the U.S. extended $1 billion in Lend-Lease credit to the Soviet Union.**
- **In November 1941 the British won the initial phase of the Battle of Britain in the air and conducted an offensive in North Africa.**

THE CONVENTIONAL VIEW:

The *Wehrmacht's* advance during Operation Barbarossa was a veritable juggernaut, a series of four successive offensives, which culminated in December 1941 with the dramatic, but ill-fated attempt to capture Moscow (See Map 1). In summary, these successive offensives (stages) included:

Map 1. The Summer-Fall Campaign of 1941



- **The Border Battles (June and early July 1941)**
- **The Battles for Luga, Smolensk, and Uman' (July-August 1941)**
- **The Battles for Leningrad and Kiev (September 1941)**
- **The Advance to Tikhvin, Moscow, and Rostov (October-December 1941)**

During the first stage of Operation Barbarossa, the border battles of June and early July, the *Wehrmacht* smashed the Red Army's strategic defenses along the Soviet Union's western frontiers and advanced rapidly along the northwestern, western, and southwestern strategic axes. German Army Groups North and Center shattered the forward defenses of the Red Army's Northwestern and Western Fronts, encircled the bulk of three Soviet armies (the 3rd, 4th, and 10th) west of Minsk, and thrust eastward across the Western Dvina and Dnepr Rivers, the Red Army's second strategic defense line.[1] Once across those two key river barriers, the two army groups lunged toward Leningrad and the key city of Smolensk. To the south, Army Group South advanced inexorably eastward toward Kiev against stronger resistance by the Southwestern Front, while other German and Rumanian forces invaded Moldavia, penetrated the Southern Front's defenses, and threatened the Soviet Black Sea port of Odessa.

During Operation Barbarossa's second stage in July and August, Army Group North captured Riga and Pskov and advanced northward toward Luga and Novgorod. Army Group Center began a month-long struggle for the city of Smolensk, in the process partially encircling three Soviet armies (the 16th, 19th, and 20th) in Smolensk proper, and fended off increasingly strong and desperate Red Army counterattacks to relieve their forces nearly isolated around the city. Army Group South drove eastward toward Kiev, encircled and destroyed two Soviet armies (the 6th and 12th) in the Uman' region, and blockaded Soviet forces in Odessa. This stage ended in late August when Hitler decided to halt temporarily his direct thrusts on Leningrad and Moscow and, instead, to attack to eliminate Soviet forces stubbornly defending Kiev and the central Ukraine.

In Barbarossa's third stage during late August and September, Army Group North besieged but failed to capture Leningrad, while Army Groups Center and South jointly attacked and encircled the bulk of the Red Army's Southwestern Front, which was defending the Kiev region. In the process, *Wehrmacht* forces encircled and destroyed four Soviet armies (the 5th, 21st, 26th, and 37th) in the Kiev region, bringing the total Soviet force eliminated in the Ukraine to the awesome figure of over 1 million men

The *Wehrmacht* began its culminating offensive on Moscow (Operation Typhoon) in early October 1941. While Army Groups North and South continued their advances on Leningrad in the north and toward Khar'kov and the Donets Basin [Donbas] in the south, Army Group Center, spearheaded by three of the *Wehrmacht's* four panzer groups, mounted a concerted offensive to capture Moscow. The attacking German forces

[1] While the Germans employed army groups as their premier strategic force, the Red Army employed *fronts*, which, initially, were roughly equivalent in size and mission to army groups. After the 1941 campaign, the Red Army reduced the size and increased the number of *fronts*, making them roughly equivalent to German armies.

tore through Red Army defenses, routed three Red Army *fronts*, and quickly encircled and destroyed five Soviet armies (the 16th, 19th, 20th, 24th, and 32nd) around Viaz'ma and three more Soviet armies (the 50th, 3rd, and 13th) north and south of Briansk. After a short delay prompted by deteriorating weather and sharply increasing Soviet resistance, Operation Typhoon culminated in mid-November when Army Group Center attempted to envelop Soviet forces defending Moscow by dramatic armored thrusts from the north and south.

In early December 1941, however, the effects of time, space, attrition, desperate Red Army resistance, and sheer fate combined to deny the *Wehrmacht* a triumphant climax to its six months of near constant victories. Weakened by months of heavy combat in a theater of war they never really understood, the vaunted *Wehrmacht* finally succumbed to the multiple foes of harsh weather, alien terrain, and a fiercely resisting enemy. Amassing its reserve armies, in early December the *Stavka* (Soviet High Command) halted the German drive within sight of the Kremlin's spires in Moscow and unleashed a counteroffensive of its own that inflicted unprecedented defeat on Hitler's German Army. Simultaneously, the Soviet forces struck back at German forces on the northern and southern flanks. Red Army offensives at Tikhvin, east of Leningrad, and at Rostov in the south, drove German forces back, denying Hitler victory along any of the three principal strategic axes.

Thus, the conventional view of the summer-fall campaign includes the following major operations:

- **The Border Battles (June-July 1941)**
- **The German Advance on Leningrad (July-September 1941)**
- **The Battle of Smolensk (July-August 1941)**
- **The Uman' and Kiev Encirclements (August-September 1941)**
- **German Operation Typhoon and the Viaz'ma and Briansk Encirclements (30 September-5 November 1941)**
- **The German Advance on Moscow (7 November-4 December 1941)**
- **The German Tikhvin Offensive (16 October-18 November 1941)**
- **The German Advance on Khar'kov, the Crimea, and Rostov (18 October-16 November 1941)**
- **The Soviet Rostov Counterstroke (17 November-2 December 1941)**

THE FORGOTTEN WAR:

New archival evidence now indicates that, from the very day that Operation "Barbarossa" began, Stalin and the *Stavka* consistently and repeatedly attempted to halt and drive back the German juggernaut.[2] Beginning in late June and extending into July, August, and September, they ordered the Red Army to conduct a series of operations in the form of counterattacks, counterstrokes, and, in one case, a full-fledged counteroffensive, all of which represented clumsy attempts to implement the Red

[2] Although Stalin and his *Stavka* were different but overlapping entities, they were essentially one and the same.

Army's 1941 State Defense Plan. However, the extremely fluid combat situation and the rapid German advance made these offensive operations seem uncoordinated and prevented the Germans from recognizing them for what they actually were. Close examination of newly released documents, including *Stavka* and *front* orders, clearly indicates that the *Stavka* attempted to coordinate these operations with regard to their timing, conduct, and objectives.

The list of neglected or totally forgotten operations includes the following:

- **The Soviet Rasenai, Grodno, and Dubno Counterstrokes (June 1941)**
- **The Soviet Soltsy, Lepel', Bobruisk, and Kiev Counterstrokes (July 1941)**
- **The Soviet Staraia Russa, Smolensk, and Kiev Counterstrokes (August 1941)**
- **The Soviet Smolensk, El'nia, and Roslavl' Offensive (September 1941)**
- **The Soviet Kalinin Counterstroke (October 1941)**

The initial counterattacks and counterstrokes the Red Army launched in late June were poorly coordinated and usually futile attempts by respective Soviet *front* commanders to implement their standing war plans, which ordered them to react vigorously to any enemy advance. These actions included virtually suicidal counterattacks by two Northwestern Front mechanized corps (the 3rd and 12th) at and north of Raseinai in Lithuania, by three Western Front mechanized corps (the 6th, 11th, and 14th) in the Dubno and Brest regions in Belorussia, and by six Southwestern Front mechanized corps (the 6th, 8th, 9th, 15th, 19th, and 22nd) in the Brody and Dubno region in the Ukraine. However, only the violent assaults in the south had any noticeable effect on the German advance.

In July the *Stavka* once again orchestrated counterstrokes in three principal regions, all timed to coincide with one another. The Northwestern Front conducted a vigorous assault on the lead elements of Army Group's LVI Motorized Corps at Sol'tsy but only managed to delay the German army group's advance by a matter of days. Along the Moscow axis, the Western and Central Fronts mounted multiple futile counterstrokes to prevent Army Group Center's forces from crossing the Dnepr River or to drive those forces that already crossed the river back to its western bank. These failed actions included the spectacular defeat of two Red Army mechanized corps (the 5th and 7th) in the Lepel' region, the famous but pathetically weak "Timoshenko Offensive" along the Sozh River, and a marginally successful Soviet counterstroke near Bobruisk, after which Army Group Center accelerated its advance on Smolensk. Similarly, to the south, counterattacks by the Southwestern Front failed to halt the German advance on Kiev from the west.

The *Stavka* ordered its operating *fronts* to take even stronger measures to counter the German advance in August. The ensuing action included major Red Army counterstrokes in the Staraia Russa and Smolensk regions, and weaker counterattacks southwest of Kiev. Even though all of these Soviet counteractions failed, the ferocity of

its Smolensk counterstroke convinced Hitler to turn his attention away from Moscow and toward Kiev.

In late August and early September, Stalin ordered his three *fronts* (the Western, Reserve, and Briansk), which were defending along the Moscow axis, to mount powerful offensives to destroy German forces in the Smolensk region and prevent German forces from striking southward from Smolensk toward Kiev. The bloody failure of this major counteroffensive so weakened Soviet forces along the Moscow axis that it contributed directly to the Red Army's disastrous defeats in early October during the initial stages of Operation Typhoon.

REFLECTIONS:

The Red Army's vigorous but futile attempts to counter Operation Barbarossa yield several crystal clear conclusions. First, the *Stavka* well understood the nature of the catastrophe that was taking place across the front and acted forcefully to remedy the situation. It ordered the conduct of virtually all of the counteroffensives, counterstrokes, and major counterattacks cited above, and it strove to coordinate these counteractions with regard to their timing, location, and objectives. Second, the *Stavka* woefully misunderstood the capabilities of its own forces and those of the *Wehrmacht* by congenitally overestimating the former and underestimating the latter. As a result, the *Stavka* assigned the Red Army utterly unrealistic missions with predictably disastrous results. Although *Stavka* planning became more sophisticated as the campaign progressed, the missions it assigned its forces became ever more ambitious and unrealistic, producing ever more spectacular and devastating Red Army defeats.

Third, Soviet command cadre, in particular its senior officers, but also the Red Army's more junior officers, NCOs, and enlisted soldiers lacked the experience necessary to contend with the better led and more tactically and operationally proficient *Wehrmacht*. The *Stavka* would not fully understand this reality until mid-1942. Finally, the Red Army's logistical and support infrastructure was totally inadequate to meet the requirements of modern, highly mobile war. In part at least, the *Stavka's* ultimate realization of these shortcomings prompted the ensuing deafening silence that enveloped the very existence of many of these forgotten battles and operations.

HISTORICAL DEBATES:

Historical debates and the issues that provoke them fall into two general categories, first, the "What if's" of history, and second, genuine arguments over the validity or interpretation of concrete facts and occurrences. The latter category concerns such genuine issues as "Whether the Soviet Union intended to conduct a preventative war against Germany in the summer of 1941?" or "Did Stalin order an assault on Berlin in February 1945?" and "If not, Why?" Since debates in this category address genuine, concrete occurrences and focus on whether or not it occurred and why, they are legitimate and cannot be resolved with any certainty until all of the facts associated with the actual or supposed occurrence are known. Unfortunately, in many cases the truth of these debates depends on the motivations of key persons involved in them and, hence, is

difficult or impossible to determine. While difficult to resolve, these debates are nevertheless essential parts of the history of the war.

On the other hand, the "What If's" are suppositions, inferences, or simple flights of fancy unsupportable by fact since the events subject to analysis never actually occurred and thus belong outside the parameters of history. Although it is futile to debate these "What if's", human nature dictates that they persist. Since they do, they must and will be at least addressed.

- The Myth of Stalin's Preventative War:

On 15 May 1941, General G, K. Zhukov, then Chief of the Red Army General Staff, sent Stalin a proposal for a preventative offensive against German forces concentrating in Eastern Poland. Although Defense Commissar S. K. Timoshenko initialed the proposal, there is no evidence either that Stalin saw it or acted upon it. The proposal and other fragmentary evidence provides the basis for recent claims that Stalin indeed intended to conduct a preventative war against Germany beginning in July 1941 and that Hitler's Operation Barbarossa preempted Stalin's intended actions.

Current evidence refutes that assertion. As subsequent events and archival evidence proves, the Red Army was in no condition to wage war in the summer of 1941 either offensively or, as the actual course of combat indicated, defensively.

- The Timing of Operation Barbarossa:

Hitler commenced Operation Barbarossa on 22 June 1941, after delaying his invasion of the Soviet Union for roughly two months so that the *Wehrmacht* could conquer Yugoslavia and Greece. Some have claimed that this delay proved fatal for Operation Barbarossa. Had Germany invaded the Soviet Union in April rather than June, they state, Moscow and Leningrad would have fallen, and Hitler would have achieved his Barbarossa objectives.

This assertion is incorrect. Hitler's Balkan diversion took place at a time of year when the spring thaw (the *rasputitsa* [literally, "time of clogged roads"]) prevented extensive military operations of any scale, particularly mobile panzer operations, in the western Soviet Union. Furthermore, the forces Hitler committed in the Balkans was only a small portion of his overall Barbarossa force, and it returned from the Balkans in good condition and in time to play its role in Barbarossa.

A corollary to this issue is the thesis that the *Wehrmacht* would have performed better if Hitler had postponed Barbarossa until the summer of 1942. This is quite unlikely, since Stalin's program to reform, reorganize, and reequip the Red Army, which was woefully incomplete when the Germans struck in 1941, would have been fully completed by the summer of 1942. Although the *Wehrmacht* would still have been more tactically and operationally proficient than the Red Army in 1942, the latter would have possessed a larger and more formidable mechanized force equipped with armor superior to that of the Germans. In addition, Hitler would have invaded the Soviet Union with the

full knowledge that he was then engaging in a two-front war with the United States (and perhaps Britain) and the Soviet Union.

- Guderian's Southward Turn (Kiev)

In September 1941, after Red Army resistance stiffened east of Smolensk, Hitler temporarily abandoned his direct thrust on Moscow by turning one half of Army Group Center's panzer forces (Guderian's Second Panzer Group) to the south to envelop and destroy the Soviet Southwestern Front, which was defending Kiev. By virtue of Guderian's southward turn, the *Wehrmacht* destroyed the entire Southwestern Front east of Kiev during September, inflicting 600,000 losses on the Red Army, while Soviet forces west of Moscow conducted a futile and costly offensive against German forces around Smolensk. After this Kiev diversion, Hitler launched Operation Typhoon in October, only to see his offensive falter at the gates of Moscow in early December. Some claim that had Hitler launched Operation Typhoon in September rather than October, the Wehrmacht would have avoided the terrible weather conditions and reached and captured Moscow before the onset of winter.

This argument too does not hold up to close scrutiny. Had Hitler launched Operation Typhoon in September, Army Group Center would have had to penetrate deep Soviet defenses manned by a force that had not squandered its strength in fruitless offensives against German positions east of Smolensk. Furthermore, Army Group Center would have launched its offensive with a force of more than 600,000 men threatening its ever-extending right flank and, in the best reckoning, would have reached the gates of Moscow after mid-October just as the fall rainy season was beginning.

Finally, the *Stavka* saved Moscow by raising and fielding 10 reserve armies that took part in the final defense of the city, the December 1941 counterstrokes, and the January 1942 counteroffensive. These armies would have gone into action regardless of when Hitler launched Operation Typhoon. While they effectively halted and drove back the German offensive short of Moscow as the operation actually developed, they would also have been available to do so had the Germans attacked Moscow a month earlier. Furthermore, if the latter were the case, they would have been able to operate in conjunction with the 600,000 plus force of Army Group Center's overextended right flank.

- "What if" Moscow had Fallen:

The argument that Hitler would have won the war if the *Wehrmacht* had been able to capture Moscow, a corollary to the arguments described above, is also subject to serious question. If Hitler's legions had actually reached and tried to capture Moscow, it is likely that Stalin would have assigned one or more of his reserve armies to fight and die in its defense. Although the Germans might have seized the bulk of the city, they would likely have found themselves facing the same lamentable dilemma that the Sixth Army faced at Stalingrad a year later. More ominous still, had it captured Moscow, the *Wehrmacht* would have faced the daunting task of trying to winter in Moscow, with the inherent danger of emulating the fate of Napoleon's army in 1812.

THE WINTER CAMPAIGN, DECEMBER 1941-APRIL 1942

CONTEXT:

A COMPARATIVE CHRONOLOGY OF OPERATIONS ON THE EASTERN AND WESTERN FRONTS DURING THE WINTER CAMPAIGN OF 1941-42

- **On 7 December 1941 the United States lost the bulk of its Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor to a surprise attack by Japan and declared war on the Empire of Japan (8 December), and Germany declared war on the U.S. (11 December). U.S. Army strength reached 1,643,477 men in 4 armies and 37 divisions (including 5 armored and 2 cavalry).**
- **In December 1941, after just six months of war, the Soviet Union had lost almost 5 million men, virtually its entire prewar army, and territory equivalent in U.S. terms to the entire region from the Atlantic coast to Springfield, Illinois, but survived and, during the Battle for Moscow, inflicted the first defeat on Hitler's *Wehrmacht* that it had ever experienced. Red Army strength reached 4,200,000 men in 43 armies.**

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- **In January 1942 the German *Afrika* Corps began its advance toward Egypt with 3 German and 7 Italian divisions against 7 British divisions.**
- **In January and February 1942, 9 Red Army *fronts* [army groups] with 37 armies and over 350 divisions smashed German defenses on a front of 600 miles (Staraia Russa to Belgorod) and drove German forces back 80-120 miles before the Germans stabilized their defensive front in March.**

THE CONVENTIONAL VIEW:

While the *Wehrmacht* was conducting Operation Typhoon, the *Stavka* was frantically raising and deploying fresh reserves to counter the German onslaught. Straining every available resource, it fielded 10 additional field armies during November and December 1941, 6 of which it committed to combat in or adjacent to the Moscow region (the 10th, 26th, 39th, 1st Shock, 60th, and 61st) during its November defense or during its December 1941 and January 1942 counteroffensives. Even though these fresh armies were only pale reflections of what Soviet military theory required them to be, their presence would prove that adage that quantity has a quality of its own. These hastily assembled reserves were especially valuable given the attrition that afflicted the *Wehrmacht* during its final thrust toward Moscow. By 1 November it had lost fully 20 percent of its committed strength (686,000 men), up to 2/3 of its 1/2-million motor vehicles, and 65 percent of its tanks. The German Army High Command (OKH) rated its 136 divisions as equivalent to 83 full-strength divisions. Logistics were strained to the

breaking point, and, as the success of the Red Army's counteroffensive indicated, the Germans were clearly not prepared for combat in winter conditions.

At this juncture, to the Germans' surprise, on 5 December the Red Army struck back with the first in what became a long series of counterstrokes, which ultimately grew into a full-fledged counteroffensive (See Map 2). In reality, the December 1941 counteroffensive, which ended in early January 1942, consisted of a series of consecutive and then simultaneous multi-army operations whose cumulative effect was to drive German forces back from the immediate approaches to Moscow.

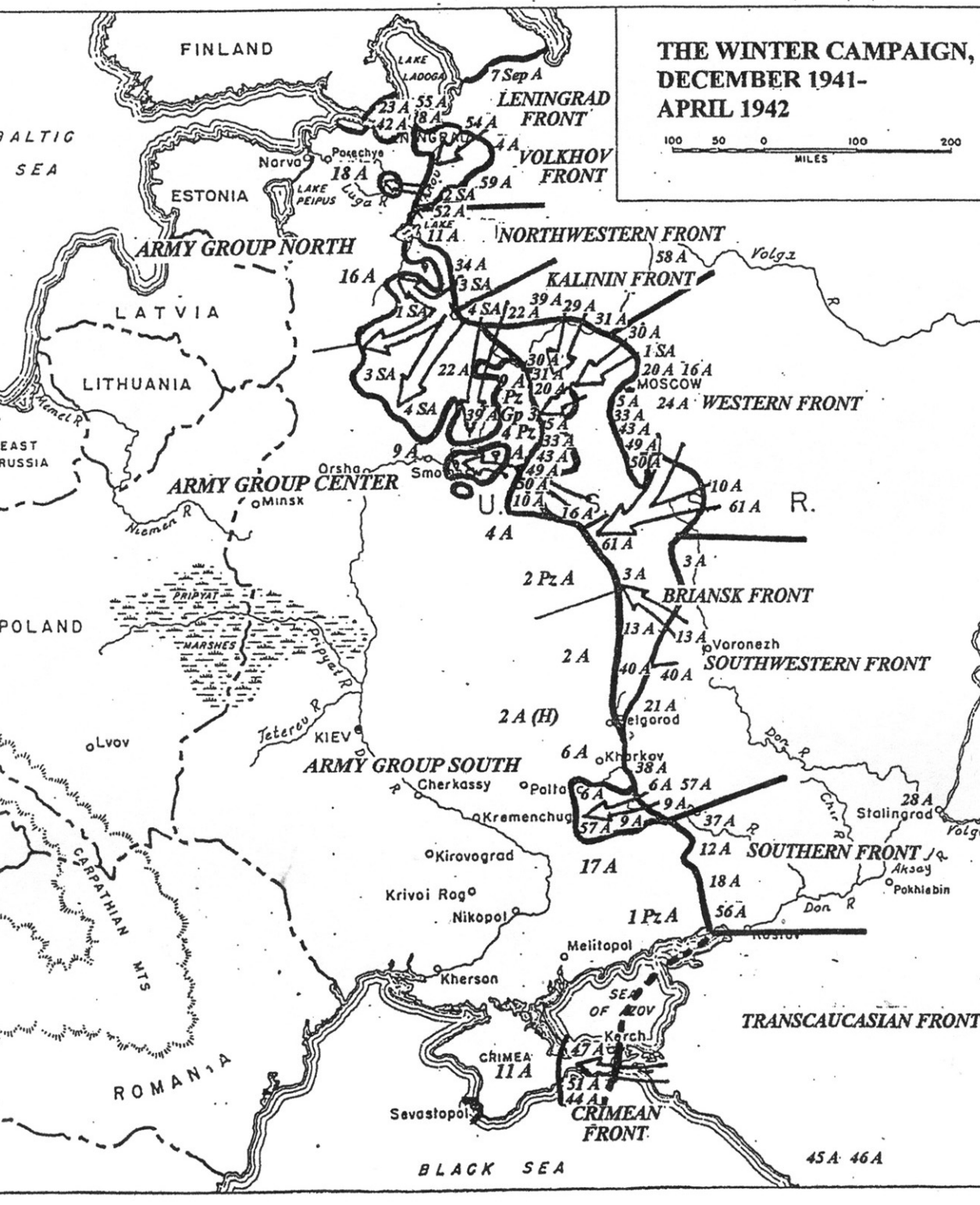
During the initial phase of this counteroffensive, right wing and center of General Zhukov's Western Front (spearheaded by the new 1st Shock Army and a cavalry corps) drove Army Group Center's Third and Fourth Panzer Groups westward from the northern outskirts of Moscow through Klin to the Volokolamsk region. Soon after, General Konev's Kalinin Front added insult to German injury by seizing Kalinin and advancing to the northern outskirts of Rzhev. To the south, the Western Front's left wing (including the new 10th Army and a cavalry Group commanded by General P. A. Belov) sent Guderian's Second Panzer Army reeling westward in disorder from Tula. Subsequently, the Western and Southwestern Fronts (including the new 61st Army) nearly encircled major elements of Army Group Center's Fourth Army near Kaluga, split this army away from Second Panzer Army by a deep thrust to Mosal'sk and Sukhinichi, and pushed German Second Army southward toward Orel. The ferocity and relentlessness of the Red Army's assaults sorely tested the *Wehrmacht's* staying power and prompted Hitler to issue his "stand fast" order, which may have forestalled complete German rout.

Swept away by a burst of optimism born of his army's sudden and unexpected success, in early January 1942 Stalin ordered the Red Army to commence a general offensive along the entire front from the Leningrad region to the Black Sea. The second stage of the Red Army's Moscow counteroffensive, which began on 8 January, consisted of several distinct *front* offensive operations whose overall aim was the complete destruction of German Army Group Center. The almost frenzied Soviet counteroffensives in the Moscow region placed enormous pressure on defending German forces as they sought to regain their equilibrium. The counteroffensive also resulted in immense losses among Soviet forces, which by late February had lost much of their offensive punch. By this time, Red Army forces had reached the approaches to Vitebsk, Smolensk, Viaz'ma, Briansk, and Orel and had carved huge gaps in the *Wehrmacht's* defenses west of Moscow.

While the Red Army's Kalinin and Western Fronts were savaging the Army Group Center west of Moscow, other Red Army *fronts* were conducting major offensives southeast of Leningrad and south of Khar'kov in the Ukraine and managed to penetrate the *Wehrmacht's* defenses and lunge deep into its rear area. However, even though the advancing Soviet forces seized huge swathes of open countryside across the entire front, the Germans held firm to the cities, towns, and major roads. By late February the front was a patchwork quilt of overlapping Soviet and German forces, and neither side was able to overcome the other. In fact, the Soviet offensive had stalled, and, despite his

exhortations, entreaties, and threats, Stalin could not rekindle the offensive flame. Although the local counterstrokes in the immediate vicinity of Moscow had grown into a full-fledged counteroffensive and then into a general strategic offensive that formed the centerpiece of a full-fledged Red Army winter campaign, both the Moscow offensive and the winter campaign expired in utter exhaustion in late April 1942.

Map 2. The Winter Campaign of 1941-42.



Thus, the conventional view of the winter campaign of 1941-42 includes the following major operations:

- **The Soviet Moscow Counteroffensive (5 December 1941-7 January 1942)**
- **The Soviet Moscow Offensive (The Battle for Moscow) (8 January-20 April 1942)**
- **The Soviet Tikhvin Offensive (10 November-30 December 1941)**
- **The Soviet Demiansk Offensive (7 January-25 February 1942)**
- **The Soviet Toropets-Kholm Offensive (9 January-6 February 1942)**
- **The Soviet Barvenkovo-Lozovaia Offensive (18-31 January 1942)**
- **The Soviet Kerch-Feodosiia Offensive (25 December 1941-2 January 1942)**

THE FORGOTTEN WAR:

Glaring gaps exist in the historical record of the winter campaign of 1941-1942. The more serious of these is the absence of substantial accounts of combat on the extreme flanks of the Moscow counteroffensive and elsewhere along the vast expanse of the Soviet-German front. These operations, which have been overlooked in the accounts written by Soviet and German historians alike, include three major failed offensives on the southern flank of the Battle for Moscow, two partially successful offensives further north, and another failed offensive in the Crimea. The list of forgotten or partially neglected operations includes the following:

- **The Soviet Liuban' (Leningrad-Novgorod) Offensive (7 January-30 April 1942)**
- **The Soviet Demiansk Offensive (1 March-30 April 1942)**
- **The Soviet Rzhev-Sychevka Offensive (15 February-1 March 1942)**
- **The Soviet Orel-Bolkhov Offensive (7 January-18 February 1942)**
- **The Soviet Bolkhov Offensive (24 March-3 April 1942)**
- **The Soviet Oboian'-Kursk Offensive (3-26 January 1942)**
- **The Soviet Crimean Offensive (27 February-15 April 1942)**

Although much has been written about the Red Army's offensive at Moscow in January 1942, deafening silence envelops several major offensive operations that the Red Army conducted on the flanks of the Moscow offensive. In early January 1942, the 10th Army and Cavalry Group Belov, which were operating on the left flank of Zhukov's Western Front, penetrated westward to the approaches to the city of Kirov, forming an enormous salient between the defenses of Army Group Center's Fourth and Second Panzer Armies. On the Western Front's right flank, the 4th Shock, 29th, and 39th Armies of Konev's Kalinin Front advanced southward from Rzhev toward Viaz'ma in Army Group Center's deep rear. The twin Soviet advances threatened to envelop, surround, and destroy all of Army Group Center's forces operating east of Smolensk.

Stalin quickly seized the opportunity to cap his Moscow victories with one grand encirclement operation against Army Group Center by ordering Group Belov and the 50th Army to swing northward toward Viaz'ma to link up with the Kalinin Front's forces advancing from the north. Simultaneously, he ordered the 10th Army to sever communications between the German Fourth and Second Panzer Armies. Although the Red Army's two attacking pincers failed to link up at Viaz'ma and generated months of fruitless seesaw struggle, the 10th Army's progress created yet another new offensive opportunity.

The 10th Army's advance toward Kirov isolated Army Group Center's Second Panzer and Second Armies in a huge salient formed around the cities of Belev and Bolkhov, a salient that defended against subsequent Soviet advance to Kursk, and Belgorod. Understanding that the reduction of this salient was vital to its overall success in the Moscow offensive, the *Stavka* ordered the Briansk and Southwestern Fronts to conduct twin operations aimed at eradicating the pesky German bulge. However, the two offensives (called the Oboian'-Kursk and Bolkhov offensives) failed to achieve their ends and have since literally disappeared from the annals of the war.

During the same period, Stalin ordered the Leningrad and Volkhov Fronts to raise the siege of Leningrad by conducting concentric assaults across the Neva and Volkhov Rivers against Army Group North. Although the Volkhov Front's 2nd Shock Army and a cavalry corps managed to penetrate German defenses, they too were soon isolated deep in the German rear only to be destroyed by German counterstrokes between May and July 1942. This operation too languished in obscurity for over 40 years, primarily because it was an embarrassing failure but also because the 2nd Shock Army's last commander was the infamous General A. A. Vlasov, who surrendered in disgust to the Germans and later created the Russian Liberation Army that fought alongside Germany until war's end.

Similarly, Red Army offensives during the winter of 1941-42, which sought to destroy German forces in the Demiansk salient and relieve Soviet forces besieged in the city of Sevastopol' in the Crimea also ended in failure and subsequently disappeared from Soviet military history.

REFLECTIONS:

It is now abundantly clear that the Red Army offensives planned by Stalin, Zhukov, and other *Stavka* members during the winter campaign of 1941-42 represented a comprehensive and coordinated attempt to collapse the *Wehrmacht's* defenses across the entire span of the Soviet-German front. It is also clear that, in comparison with the Red Army's actual capabilities, these strategic offensives were excessively ambitious. As is so often the case in the initial period of any war, few if any of the Soviet players understood the real capabilities of their forces or, even more telling, those of the enemy.

During the first stage of the Soviet counteroffensive, memories of the Red Army's disastrous fall experiences limited both Stalin's and the *Stavka's* strategic horizons. For example, in December 1941 Stalin sought to achieve success only at Tikhvin, Rostov, and in the immediate vicinity of Moscow, where the German threat was most acute. By mid-December, however, the spectacular success the Red Army had achieved in these regions

prompted the *Stavka* to expand its offensive with utter and ruthless abandon. Urged on by Stalin, as early as 17 December, it ordered ambitious attacks along virtually the entire Soviet-German front, employing all of the Red Army's strategic and operational reserves. Nor did considerations of the human cost of these efforts dampen the offensive ardor of the Red Army's senior leadership. Predictably, however, the offensives fell well short of achieving their strategic ends. Once they had recovered from the shock of the initial setbacks, the German High Command coolly parried the *Stavka's* blows, inflicting massive and grievous casualties on the Red Army in the process.

HISTORICAL DEBATES:

- Hitler's "Stand Fast" Order

On 18 December 1941, two weeks after the Red Army began its counteroffensive at Moscow and drove *Wehrmacht* forces back from the outskirts of Moscow in disorder, Hitler ordered his commanders to stand fast with "fanatical resistance" in the face of the Red Army onslaught. Although his order took all command initiative out of his commanders' hands, the tenacious defense demanded by Hitler ultimately reversed the tide at Moscow and, unwittingly assisted by the Red Army's inability to sustain deep offensive operations, the *Wehrmacht* weathered the crisis and was able and willing to embark on another strategic offensive in 1942.

However, while Hitler's "stand fast" strategy succeeded in the circumstances of late 1941 and 1942, the application of the same strategy in subsequent operations later in the war spelled doom for an increasing number of *Wehrmacht* formations. Similar orders to the German Sixth Army at Stalingrad in November and December 1942 condemned that army to destruction. Similarly, while "stand fast" orders to Army Group Center in late 1943 saved cities such as Vitebsk from capture by the Red Army, when Hitler insisted on the same in the summer of 1944, it contributed to the loss of three armies and the bulk of an army group at Vitebsk, Bobruisk, and Minsk.

By 1944 Hitler's "stand fast" order had evolved into his "fortress" [*festung*] strategy, which insured the loss of numerous encircled cities together with their garrisons and certainly hastened ultimate German defeat.

- Stalin's "Broad Front" Strategy

Postwar Russian critiques of Stalin's direction of the Battle of Moscow, including those written by his closest subordinates (such as Zhukov), harshly criticize the dictator's employment of a "broad front" strategy to defeat the *Wehrmacht*. This strategy, they claim, dissipated the Red Army's limited strength by requiring it to conduct offensive operations along multiple axes and insured that no single offensive achieve its ultimate aims. The same critics, in particular Zhukov, argue that, after the spring of 1942, Stalin finally heeded the advice of his advisers and discarded the "broad front" strategy in favor of a more selective approach. Thereafter, they claim, Stalin and the *Stavka* carefully selected key offensive axis, concentrated the Red Army along these axes, and tailored the attacking forces to match the missions they were assigned.

However, recently revealed archival materials clearly refute this claim in two respects. First, while Stalin did indeed adopt a "broad front" offensive strategy in the winter of 1941-42, his key advisers (including Zhukov) acquiesced in and encouraged that strategy, agreeing with Stalin that the best way to collapse German defenses in any given sector was to apply maximum pressure against all sectors. Second, rather than abandoning that strategy after the spring of 1942, Stalin and the *Stavka* adhered to it in 1942, 1943, and early 1944 for the same reasons they had in 1941. Only in the summer of 1944 did they adopt the policy of conducting staggered and successive offensive operations. As late as January 1945, the Red Army once again employed the "broad front" strategy, albeit on a smaller scale, in its strategic offensive into East Prussia and central Poland.

- The Battle of Moscow as a "Turning Point"

For years debates have raged among historians over "turning points" in the Soviet-German War, specifically, regarding precisely when the fortunes of war turned in the Red Army's favor and why. These debates have surfaced three leading candidates for the honor of being designated "turning points," specifically, the Battles of Moscow, Stalingrad, and Kursk, and, more recently, a fourth, Guderian's southward turn to Kiev. Two of these battle occurred during the 1st period of the war, throughout which the *Wehrmacht* maintained the strategic initiative with exception of the five-month period from December 1941 through April 1942 during the Red Army's winter campaign. Therefore, by definition, Russian historians identify the Battle of Stalingrad as the most important "turning point" since the Germans lost the strategic initiative irrevocably only after that battle.

In fact, the Battle of Moscow represents one of three "turning points" in the war but by no means was it the most decisive. At Moscow the Red Army inflicted an unprecedented defeat on the Wehrmacht and prevented Hitler from achieving the objectives of Operation Barbarossa. In short, after the Battle of Moscow, Germany could no longer defeat the Soviet Union or win the war on the terms set forth by Hitler.

Finally, Guderian's southward turn and the ensuing delay in Hitler's offensive to capture Moscow cannot qualify as a crucial "turning point." In fact, it may have improved the *Wehrmacht's* chances for victory over the Red Army at Moscow by eliminating the Red Army's massive Southwestern Front as a key player in the fall portion of the campaign and by setting up the Western, Reserve, and Briansk Fronts for their equally decisive October defeats. Furthermore, at the time, few, if any figures in the *Wehrmacht's* senior strategic leadership either opposed Guderian's "turn" or anticipated the subsequent German defeat at Moscow.

THE SUMMER-FALL CAMPAIGN, MAY-OCTOBER 1942

Context

A COMPARATIVE CHRONOLOGY OF OPERATIONS ON THE EASTERN AND WESTERN FRONTS DURING THE SUMMER-FALL CAMPAIGN OF 1942

- **In June 1942 the British Army was still in full retreat in North Africa, the Battle of the Atlantic was raging, and the United States had turned back the Japanese advance in the Pacific at Midway. U.S. Army strength overseas at 520,000 men (60 % in the Pacific, and 40 % in the Caribbean).**
- **On 28 June 1942, Hitler launched Operation Blau with roughly 2 million troops toward Stalingrad and the Caucasus, smashing the defenses of about 1.8 million Red Army troops in southern Russia. By September 1942 German forces had advanced to a depth equivalent in U.S. terms to the entire region from the Atlantic coast to Topeka, Kansas.**

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- **In September 1942, British forces halted the German advance in North Africa and prepared a counteroffensive with 10 divisions. U.S. strength in Europe reached 170,000 men.**
- **In September 1942, German forces reached Stalingrad and the foothills of the Caucasus Mountains, but, in late October, halted operations to destroy Soviet forces in Stalingrad.**

The Conventional View

After the Red Army's winter offensive collapsed in late April 1942, a period of relative calm descended over the Soviet-German front while both sides reorganized and refitted their forces and sought ways to regain the strategic initiative. Eager to accomplish the objectives that had eluded him during the winter, Stalin preferred that the Red Army resume its general offensive in summer 1942. After prolonged debate, however, other *Stavka* members convinced the dictator that Hitler was sure to renew his offensive toward Moscow in the summer to accomplish the most important goal of Operation Barbarossa. Even though Stalin finally agreed to conduct a deliberate strategic defense along the Moscow axis, he insisted that the Red Army conduct offensive operations in other sectors at least to weaken the German blow toward Moscow and perhaps to regain the strategic initiative as well. Consequently, Stalin ordered his forces to mount two offensives; the first in the Khar'kov region and the second in the Crimea.

Nor was Hitler chastened by the *Wehrmacht's* winter setbacks. Confident that his forces could still achieve many of Operation Barbarossa's original aims, Hitler and his High Command planned a new campaign designed to erase sad memories and fulfill the Third Reich's most ambitious strategic objectives. On 5 April 1942, Hitler issued

Fuehrer Directive No. 41, which ordered the *Wehrmacht* to conduct Operation *Blau* [Blue], a massive offensive in the summer of 1942 designed to capture Stalingrad and the oil-rich Caucasus region and then Leningrad. Ultimately, the *Wehrmacht* began Operation *Blau* on 28 June, after delaying the offensive for several weeks to defeat the Red Army offensives ordered by Stalin.

The first of Stalin's "spoiling" offensives began on 12 May 1942, when Marshal S. K. Timoshenko's Southwestern Front struck Army Group South's defenses north and south of Khar'kov (See Map 3). Predictably, the Soviet offensive faltered after only limited gains, and German panzer forces assembled to conduct Operation *Blau* then counterattacked and crushed Timoshenko's assault force, killing or capturing over 270,000 Red Army troops. Days before, the German Eleventh Army in the Crimea added insult to injury by defeating a feeble offensive launched by the inept Crimean Front and then drove its remnants into the sea, killing or capturing another 150,000 Red Army soldiers and. Although the twin Soviet offensives did succeed in delaying the launch of Operation *Blau*, they also severely weakened Red Army forces in southern Russia and set them up for even greater defeat when *Blau* finally began.

On 28 June the massed forces of Army Group South's left wing (the German Fourth Panzer, Second and Sixth Armies, and Second Hungarian Army) struck and utterly shattered the Briansk and Southwestern Fronts' defenses along a 280-mile front from the Kursk region to the Northern Donets River. While the army group's left wing thrust rapidly eastward toward Voronezh on the Don River and then swung southward along the south bank of the Don, the remainder of the army group (German First Panzer and Seventeenth Armies and Rumanian Third and Fourth Armies) joined the offensive on 7 July, pushing eastward across a 170-mile front and then wheeling south across the open steppes toward Rostov. Within two weeks the *Wehrmacht's* offensive demolished the Red Army's entire defense in southern Russia, as the *Stavka* tried frantically to repair the damage and slow the German juggernaut.

A week after Operation *Blau* began, Stalin reluctantly accepted the reality that the German summer offensive was actually taking place in southern Russia and altered his strategy accordingly by ordering his stricken forces to withdraw eastward. At the same time, the *Stavka* began raising 10 fresh reserve armies and deployed the first of these armies to slow and contain the German advance. All the while, it began planning for future counterstrokes and counteroffensives at places and times of its own choosing.

Throughout July and August 1942, Army Group South, now reorganized into Army Group "A" and "B" so that Axis forces could be controlled more effectively in so vast a theater, advanced eastward towards the "great bend" in the Don River and Stalingrad and through Rostov into the Caucasus region. After Army Group "B's" Second Army captured Voronezh on 6 July and dug in along the Don, its Fourth Panzer and Sixth Armies swung southeastward through Millerovo toward Kalach on the Don, encircling the bulk of three Soviet armies in the process (the 9th, 28th, and 38th). At the same time, Army Group "A's" First Panzer and Seventeenth Armies cleared Soviet troops from the Voroshilovgrad region and then wheeled southward toward Rostov on the Don without encountering heavy resistance and without destroying major Soviet troop

concentrations. By 24 July Army Group “B’s” spearheads were approaching Kalach on the Don, less than 50 miles west of Stalingrad, and Army Group “A’s” forces captured Rostov and were preparing to cross the Don River into the Caucasus region.

Map 3. The Summer-Fall Campaign of 1942.

At this juncture, however, an excessively optimistic Hitler altered his plans. Instead of attacking toward Stalingrad with Army Group "B's" Sixth and Fourth Panzer Armies, he shifted the latter's advance axis southward toward the Don River east of Rostov to cut off Soviet forces before they crossed the river. This left the Sixth Army with the arduous task of forcing the Don and advancing on Stalingrad alone. Deprived of its support, the Sixth Army's advance slowed significantly in late July and early August against determined Soviet resistance and incessant counterattacks.

So slow was Sixth Army's progress that, in mid-August, Hitler once again altered his plan by ordering Fourth Panzer Army to reverse course and advance on Stalingrad from the southwest. Subsequently, the two German armies encountered significantly increased Soviet resistance and heavy fighting that severely sapped their strength as they fought their way into Stalingrad's suburbs. On 23 August the Sixth Army's XIV Panzer Corps finally reached the Volga River in a narrow corridor north of the city. Three days later Fourth Panzer Army's forces reached within artillery range of the Volga south of Stalingrad. This marked the commencement of two months of desperate and intense fighting for possession of Stalingrad proper, during which German forces fought to the point of utter exhaustion against fanatical Red Army resistance.

Meanwhile, Army Group "A" advanced deep into the Caucasus region, leaving only three Allied armies (Rumanian Third and Fourth and Italian Eighth) in Army Group "B's" reserve. The heavy fighting in Stalingrad, which decisively engaged both the Sixth and Fourth Panzer Army, forced Army Group "B" to commit these Allied armies into frontline positions north and south of Stalingrad in late August and September.

Throughout the German advance to Stalingrad, Stalin and the *Stavka* conducted a deliberate withdrawal to save their defending forces, wear down the advancing Germans, and buy time necessary to assemble fresh strategic reserves with which to mount a new counteroffensive. The Briansk, Southwestern, and Southern Fronts withdrew to the Don River from Voronezh to Stalingrad, and the Southern Front withdrew through Rostov to the northern Caucasus region, where it became the North Caucasus Front. Soon the *Stavka* formed the Voronezh, Stalingrad, and Southeastern Fronts, the first to defend the Voronezh sector and other two to defend the approaches to Stalingrad. During the fierce fighting for Stalingrad, Stalin committed just enough forces to the battle in the city's rubble to keep the conflagration raging and distract the Germans while the *Stavka* prepared for the inevitable counteroffensive.

Throughout this planned Red Army withdrawal, the various defending *fronts* mounted limited counterattacks to wear the advancing Germans down and "shape" the German strategic penetration. The most noteworthy of these counteractions took place at and around Voronezh in early July, along the Don River near Kalach in late July, and, thereafter, along the immediate approaches to and within Stalingrad. As had been the case at Moscow the year before, Stalin committed the first of his new 10 reserve armies in July and August to halt the German drive and retained control over the remainder for use in his future counteroffensive.

Finally, during August and September, the *Stavka* ordered its forces in the Leningrad region (Siniavino) and west of Moscow (Rzhev) to conduct limited objective offensives to tie down German forces in those regions.

Thus, according to the conventional view, the summer-fall campaign consists of the following major military operations:

- **The Soviet Khar'kov Offensive (12-29 May 1942)**
- **The Soviet Crimean Debacle (8-19 May 1942)**
- **German Operation Blau: The Advance to Stalingrad and the Caucasus (28 June-3 September 1942)**
- **The Soviet Siniavino Offensive (19 August-10 October 1942)**
- **The Battle of Stalingrad (3 September-18 November 1942)**

The Forgotten War

Conventional accounts of combat during the summer and fall of 1942 leave much unsaid. Having bested the *Wehrmacht* around Moscow and in several other regions only six months before, Stalin and his *Stavka* were reluctant to abandon the field to the Germans in 1942 and then wait months for the proper moment to launch a major counteroffensive. Nor did the Red Army of summer 1942 resemble the threadbare army of 1941. By early summer 1942, the Red Army had finally achieved some victories of its own and was in the midst of a major reorganization and reconstruction program designed to accord it the capability for successfully engaging the *Wehrmacht's* forces in the summer as well as the winter. Consequently, the *Stavka* responded to Hitler's new offensive by immediately ordering the Red Army to organize and conduct counterattacks and counterstrokes of its own. Thus, the fighting on the road to Stalingrad and elsewhere along the front during the summer was far more severe than history has recorded.

As he had during the summer if 1941, throughout July and August 1942, Stalin ordered the Red Army to launch numerous and often massive counterattacks and counterstrokes against the advancing German, both in southern Russia and along other important strategic axes. However, since most of these operations failed, they were literally subsumed by the Germans' heady advance toward Stalingrad and the Caucasus, and have remained forgotten.

These Red Army offensive operations included three major counterstrokes in the Voronezh region, one in concert with a counterstroke by two new Soviet tank armies (the 1st and 4th) west of Stalingrad, and several large-scale offensives near Siniavino, Demiansk, Rzhev, and Bolkhov in the northwestern and central sectors of the front. Russian accounts, however, have addressed only two of these operations, the Leningrad and Volkhov Fronts' Siniavino offensive in August and September 1942 against Army Group North and the Western and Kalinin Front's Rzhev-Sychevka offensive against Army Group Center's defenses in the Rzhev salient during July and August 1942.

Thus, forgotten or ignored operations of the summer-fall campaign of 1942 include the following major operations.

- **The Soviet Donbas Defense (7-24 July 1942)**
- **The Destruction of 2nd Shock Army at Miasnyi Bor (13 May-10 July 1942)**
- **The Destruction of 2nd Shock Army at Siniavino (19 August-20 October 1942)**
- **The Soviet Demiansk Offensives (July, August, September 1942)**
- **The Soviet Rzhev-Sychevka Offensive (30 July- 23 August 1942)**
- **The Soviet Zhizdra-Bolkhov Offensives (5-14 July, 23-29 August 1942)**
- **The Soviet Voronezh Offensives (4-24 July, 12-15 August, 15-28 September 1942)**

Existing Russian accounts of the Red Army's fighting withdrawal from the Donbas region are also inadequate, since, contrary to Russian assertions, German forces encircled and decimated the bulk of at least three of the withdrawing Soviet armies. Further research is required to examine the details of this fighting. The Red Army's defense along the Stalingrad axis, while covered in Russian works, also requires more detailed analysis in English-language works, particularly, the offensive by the First and Fourth Tank Armies and the set-piece penetration operations by the Sixth Army in its advance from the Don to the Volga Rivers.

The largest and most obscure Red Army counterstrokes occurred in the Voronezh region in July, August, and September 1942. While Russian sources have described the ill-fated offensive by the Briansk Front's new 5th Tank Army in brief, in reality the offensive was of far larger scale and duration than previously thought. Ultimately, the offensive lasted several weeks and involved as many as five tank corps equipped with up to 1500 tanks. Furthermore, the *Stavka* coordinated the 5th Tank Army's assault west of Voronezh in July with the counterstrokes by two other tank armies (the 1st and 4th along the approaches to the Don River west of Stalingrad.

Equally important were the three Red Army offensives in the Rzhev and Bolkhov regions, which may have had even greater aims than the simple distraction of German attention from its advance in the south. The August offensive at Bolkhov included a massive assault by the new 3rd Tank Army and several separate tank corps, while the August-September offensive near Rzhev, which was orchestrated by Zhukov and achieved moderate success, was a virtual dress rehearsal for an even larger counteroffensive in the same region later in the year (Operation Mars).

While the Soviet offensive at Siniavino east of Leningrad in July, August, and September failed disastrously, it did prevent German forces from capturing Leningrad and tied down the German Eleventh Army, which could have been put to better use elsewhere on the Soviet-German Front. As a result, the 2nd Shock Army, which the Germans had destroyed at Miasnyi Bor in June and July, was destroyed once again in September near Siniavino.

Reflections

The summer campaign of 1942 was of momentous import for the Red Army in general and for the *Stavka* in particular. In April and May 1942, Stalin and his *Stavka*

optimistically reached the conclusion that they could capitalize on their winter victories by conducting offensives that would preempt renewed German offensive operations. The *Stavka's* hopes were dashed, however, when anticipated success quickly turned into the twin debacles at Khar'kov and in the Crimea. These disasters were clearly of the *Stavka's* own making, for even after nearly a year of intense combat, it failed to comprehend either its own capabilities or those of the *Wehrmacht*.

Yet after these disasters occurred, the *Stavka* still earnestly believed that Red Army forces could either blunt or repel the German advance in Operation *Blau.* The heavy fighting around Voronezh and Zhizdra reflected this belief. Even after these counterstrokes failed, the *Stavka* repeatedly launched coordinated counterstrokes along the front, based on the assumption that the German Command must have reduced its strength elsewhere along the front in order to assemble so massive a force in southern Russia. Nor did the Red Army's immense superiority in forces in most of these offensive operations indicate that the *Stavka* expected anything less than victory. Only in late August did Stalin completely understand the reality that the Red Army would emerge victorious only after it was capable of organizing a massive strategic counteroffensive along the entire front.

Quite naturally, the nature and consequences of the summer campaign have impelled historians to look only at those operations that were most dramatic, specifically, the Red Army's spectacular defeats in May 1942, the equally spectacular (and, in retrospect, impulsive and rash) *Wehrmacht* drive to Stalingrad and into the Caucasus, and the fierce and relentless fighting in Stalingrad proper. All else seemed simply peripheral. But as is so often the case, the seemingly peripheral was indeed significant. In short, the thousands of cuts that these and associated forgotten operations inflicted on the *Wehrmacht* literally "set the German Army up" for the devastating blow it would receive at Stalingrad later in the year.

Historical Debates

- Who was Responsible for the Red Army's May Debacles?

The summer-fall campaign of 1942 began with twin Red Army disasters at Khar'kov and in the Crimea, which produced disastrous Red Army losses, and paved the way for Hitler's successful launch of Operation *Blau.* Since war's end, Russian historians have struggled to identify who was responsible for those military debacles.

In the spring of 1942, Stalin and his chief military advisers debated the proper strategic posture the Red Army should adopt in the summer of 1942. While Stalin was inclined to take the offensive, others, including Zhukov and Vasilevsky argued that the Red Army's limited capabilities and experiences, particularly regarding the conduct of offensive operations during the summer, dictated that it should conduct a strategic defense along the Moscow axis, where it expected the *Wehrmacht* to conduct its summer offensive. Once the Red Army defeated the German thrust, they argued, the Red Army could resume offensive operations.

Although Stalin accepted his advisers' advice, he did so with reservation, and, as a sop to his own desires and those of his commanders in southern Russia, he ordered the

Red Army to launch the unsuccessful two spoiling offensives. Thus, responsibility for the Red Army's May defeats rests primarily with Stalin, Marshal S. K. Timoshenko, the commander of the Southwestern Direction Command, who planned and conducted the failed offensives, and his staff, which included his commissar, Nikita Khrushchev, and his chief of staff, General I. Kh. Bagramian. General R. Ia. Malinovsky, the commander of the Southern Front, and his chief of staff, Major General A. I. General Antonov, also shared blame for the Khar'kov fiascos.

- Hitler's Strategy in Operation *Blau*

Give its lamentable outcome and the immensely adverse affect it had on the German war effort, historians have long debated the wisdom of Hitler's Operation *Blau*, the *Wehrmacht's* summer offensive to Stalingrad and the Caucasus. As a corollary many have suggested that, instead of advancing toward Stalingrad and the Caucasus in 1942, Hitler should have resumed his offensive to capture Moscow.

The criticism of Hitler's choice of strategic objectives in the summer of 1942 is entirely valid. As was the case in 1941, in 1942 he assigned missions to the *Wehrmacht* that were beyond its capabilities to resolve. Hitler's appetite for economic gain, specifically, his desire to conquer the oil-rich Caucasus region, prompted him to overextend his forces woefully by committing a single army group (Army Group South), which by definition was only capable of operating along one strategic axis, into a region which encompassed two distinct strategic axes (the Stalingrad and Caucasus axes). Although he artificially split Army Group South into Army Groups "B" an "A" to maintain the fiction that he had assigned adequate forces to cover both axes, neither group was capable of performing its mission, and each ultimately suffered defeat. In addition, circumstances forced Hitler to assign frontline combat sectors to four inadequately trained and poorly equipped Allied armies (the Third and Fourth Rumanian, Eighth Italian, and Second Hungarian Armies), each of which became premier targets for Red Army destruction during the campaign.

The alternative strategy some historians have suggested Hitler should have pursued in the summer of 1942, the seizure of Moscow, is equally ludicrous for a variety of reasons. First, by attacking Moscow, Hitler would have been advancing into the teeth of Red Army defenses where Stalin expected the offensive to occur. Red Army forces defended along the Moscow axis in depth, manning heavy fortified lines backed up by the bulk of the Red Army's strategic and operational reserves. In addition, in order to conduct an offensive against Moscow, Hitler would have had to thin out his forces in other front sectors, by doing so improving the Red Army's chances for success in their offensives in southern Russia. Thus, any Moscow gambit launched by Hitler in 1942 would likely have replicated the *Wehrmacht's* sad experiences at Moscow in 1941.

- The Leningrad Diversion

In the summer of 1942, after Manstein's Eleventh Army had destroyed Red Army forces defending the besieged city of Sevastopol' and occupied the remainder of the Crimean Peninsula, Hitler deployed Manstein's forces to the Leningrad region. Hitler intended to employ Manstein's army to assault and capture Leningrad after his forces in southern Russia emerged victorious at Stalingrad. Some historians claim that this decision by Hitler deprived *Wehrmacht* forces operating in southern Russia of a large reserve force when it most needed it. Others claim that the Eleventh Army should have captured Leningrad in concert with other Army Group North forces but failed to do so.

In retrospect, while the first criticism is indeed valid, the second is wholly unjustified. In fairness to the *Fuhrer* and his senior generals, Hitler dispatched Manstein's army to the Leningrad region only after it became apparent to them that German forces would reach and capture Stalingrad. Hitler's assumed that, with Stalingrad and most of the Caucasus in German hands, the time was appropriate to seize Leningrad. However, this assumption proved incorrect, and Stalingrad did not fall, largely because, as was the case the year before at Moscow, German intelligence significantly under-assessed the availability of Soviet strategic reserves.

As far as the German capture of Leningrad was concerned, this failed only because the *Stavka* unleashed an offensive of its own in the region, an offensive that preempted the German attack. In August 1942 the Leningrad and Volkhov Fronts conducted a massive offensive against Army Group North's defenses at Siniavino that caught the defenders by surprise and almost raised the blockade of the city. Although the Red Army's Siniavino offensive ultimately failed and resulted in the destruction of the2d Shock Army for the second time in a single year, Army Group North was able to defeat the offensive only by committing the fresh forces of Manstein's Eleventh Army. The battle s decimated Manstein's army that it was incapable of mounting a subsequent assault to capture Leningrad.

FORGOTTEN BATTLES AND HISTORICAL DEBATES: THE 2nd PERIOD OF THE WAR

THE WINTER CAMPAIGN, NOVEMBER 1942-APRIL 1943

Context

A COMPARATIVE CHRONOLOGY OF OPERATIONS ON THE EASTERN AND WESTERN FRONTS DURING THE WINTER CAMPAIGN OF 1942-43

- **In late October and November 1942, 10 British divisions, including 3 armored, with 480 tanks defeated 9 German and Italian divisions (including 2 panzer divisions), in the Battle of El Alamein, inflicting 60,000 casualties on the Germans, and, in Operation Torch, 4-5 Allied divisions (107,000 men) landed in Morocco and Algeria.**
- **In November and December 1942, 7 Soviet armies with 83 divisions, 817,000 men and 2,352 tanks struck German Ninth Army at Rzhev in Operation Mars. The 23 defending German divisions barely managed to repel the assaults, but inflicted almost 250,000 casualties on the Russians (including almost 100,000 dead) and destroyed roughly 1,700 tanks.**
- **From November 1942 to February 1943, at Stalingrad and along the Don River, 17 Soviet armies with 1,143,000 men, over 160 divisions, and 3,500 tanks destroyed or badly damaged 5 Axis armies, including 2 German, totaling more than 50 divisions, and killed or captured more than 600,000 Axis troops.**

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- **On 1 January 1943, U.S. Army strength reached 5.4 million men in 73 divisions, with 1 million men and 9 divisions in Europe.**

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- **From January through March 1943, In North Africa, 20 Allied divisions with almost 300,000 men drove 15 German and Italian divisions with about 275,000 men into Tunisia.**
- **From January through March 1943, 11 Red Army *fronts*, including 44 armies, over 4.5 million men, and over 250 divisions conducted massive offensives along a 1,000-mile front before being halted by German counterstrokes.**

The Conventional View

The Red Army's counteroffensive at Stalingrad and the ensuing winter campaign of 1942-43 were critical moments in the Soviet-German War. For the second time in the war, at Stalingrad the Red Army succeeded in halting a major German offensive and mounting a successful counteroffensive of its own. For the first time in the war, large Red Army tank and mechanized forces were able to exploit deep into the enemy's rear area, encircle, and, subsequently, destroy more than a full enemy army. For this reason, Stalingrad became one of three "turning points" in the war. The year before, the defeat at Moscow indicated that Operation Barbarossa had failed and Germany could not win the war on terms Hitler expected. The Red Army's victory at Stalingrad proved that Germany could not win the war on any terms. Later, in the summer of 1943, the immense Battle of Kursk would confirm that Germany would indeed lose the war. The only issues remaining after Kursk were, "How long would that process take, and how much would it cost?"

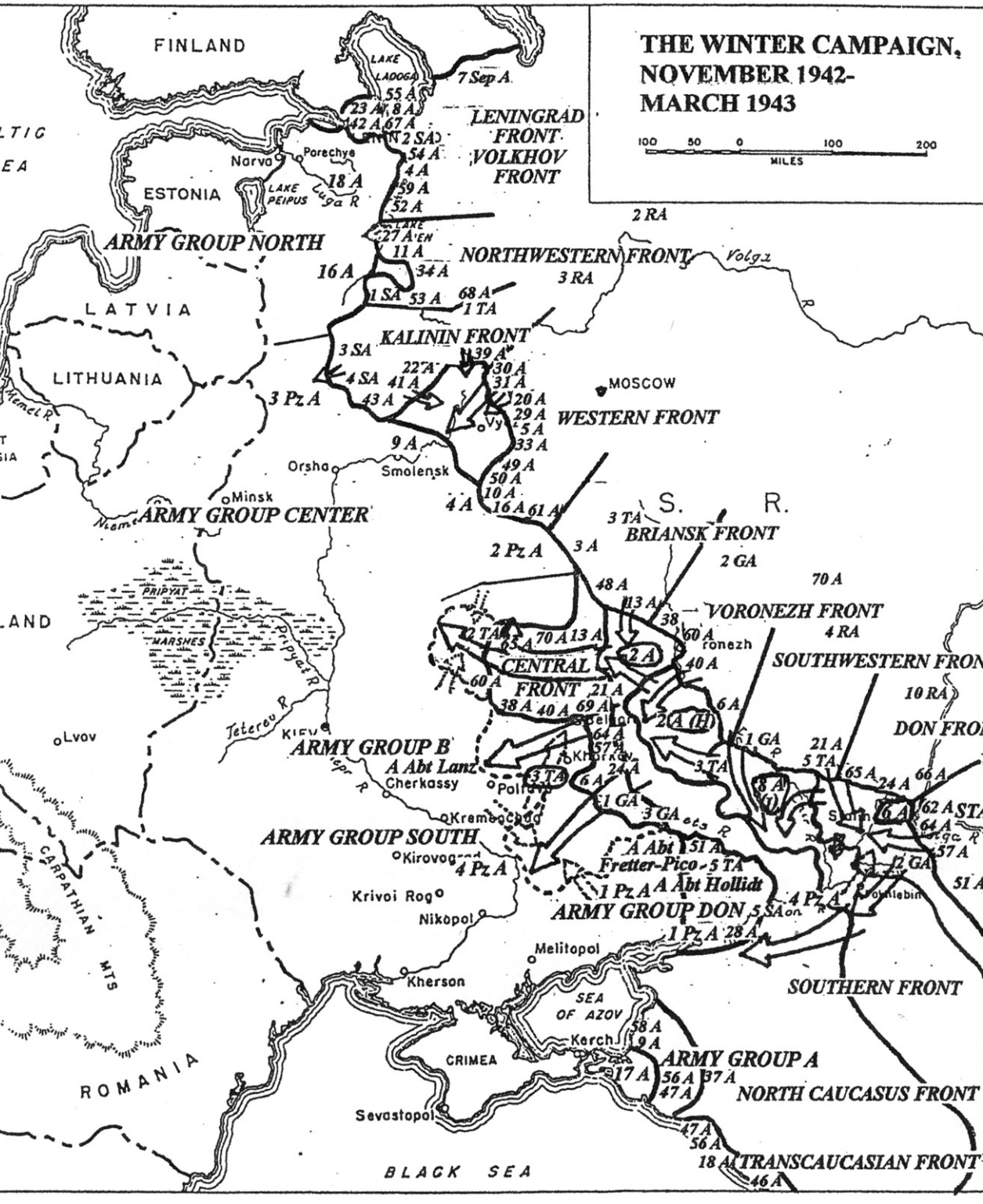
The Red Army's Stalingrad counteroffensive began on 19 November 1942, and the its ensuing winter campaign lasted from the end of the Stalingrad counteroffensive until late March 1943 (See Map 4). The conventional description of action during this period holds that the Red Army began Operation Uranus, its Stalingrad counteroffensive, on 19 November 1942, while the bulk of Army Group "B's" Sixth and Fourth Panzer Armies were bogged down fighting in the city. Within days after attacking and routing Rumanian forces defending north and south of the city, the mobile forces of the Southwestern, Don, and Stalingrad Fronts exploited deeply and linked up west of Stalingrad, encircling 300,000 German and Rumanian forces in the infamous Stalingrad pocket.

While the Don and Stalingrad Fronts' forces prepared to reduce the encircled Germans, Hitler appointed General von Manstein to command Army Group "B" (soon renamed Army Group Don) and ordered him to restore the situation in southern Russia. Manstein's orders were to relieve the German forces encircled at Stalingrad, while the German High Command extracted Army Group "A's" overextended forces from the Caucasus region. To do so, Manstein planned two operations in mid-December designed to rescue the encircled Stalingrad force, a thrust by the LVII Panzer Corps northeastward toward Stalingrad and an advance by XXXXVIII Panzer Corps directly eastward toward Stalingrad. However, the latter never materialized, and the former faltered in heavy and frustrating winter fighting. Subsequently, after a long and terrible siege, on 2 February 1943, the German forces in Stalingrad surrendered.

Manstein's relief efforts failed for two reasons. First, in mid-December, the Southwestern Front, supported by the Voronezh Front's left wing, launched a massive offensive (Operation Little Saturn) across the Don River against the Italian Eighth Army that destroyed that army and preempted the XXXXVIII Panzer Corp's relief effort. Second, in mid-December a strong Soviet defense and counterstroke by the powerful 2nd Guards Army halted and then drove back the LVII Panzer Corps' relief effort after the panzer corps reached to within 35 miles from its objective. While some historians argue that Sixth Army's refusal to break out condemned the rescue effort to failure, others claim that the severe winter conditions simply made relief impossible.

After defeating the two German relief attempts, in early January the Southwestern and Stalingrad Fronts drove German forces from the Don River bend toward Millerovo and Rostov. Then, on 13 January 1943 the Southwestern and Voronezh Fronts struck, encircled, and defeated Hungarian and Italian forces defending further north along the

Map 4. The Winter Campaign of 1942-43.



Don River, tearing an immense gap in German defenses and threatening the German Second Army, defending in the Voronezh region (the Ostrogozhsk-Rossosh' operation). Before the Germans could restore their front, on 24 January 1943, the Briansk and Voronezh Fronts attacked and nearly encircled Army Group "B's" Second Army west of Voronezh and forced the Germans to withdraw westward in disorder toward Kursk and Belgorod (the Voronezh-Kastorne operation). Simultaneously, the Southwestern and Southern Fronts drove German forces away from the approaches to Stalingrad back to the Northern Donets River and Voroshilovgrad, while the Southern (formerly Stalingrad) Front captured Rostov on 14 February and reached the Mius River by 18 February (the Rostov operation).

In late January the *Stavka* exploited its successes by ordering the Southwestern and Voronezh Fronts to mount two new offensives toward Khar'kov and into the Donbas region, and to capture Kursk as well. Initially, the two *fronts* recorded spectacular success. The Southwestern Front's forces crossed the Northern Donets River in early February, captured Voroshilovgrad on 14 February, and approached Zaporozh'e on the Dnepr River by 18 February (the Donbas operation). The Voronezh Front's forces captured Kursk and Belgorod on 8 and 9 February and Khar'kov on the 16th (the Khar'kov operation). Swept away by a wave of unbridled optimism, and assuming that the Germans were about to abandon the Donbas region, the *Stavka* assigned its forces ever-deeper objectives, even though Red Army forces were clearly becoming ragged and overextended and were outrunning their logistical support.

In the midst of these Red Army offensives, Manstein orchestrated a miraculous feat that preserved German fortunes in the region. Employing forces withdrawn from the Caucasus and fresh forces from the West, on 20 February he struck the flanks of the exploiting Southwestern Front's forces as they neared the Dnepr River. Within days, the entire Soviet force collapsed, and German forces drove Red Army forces back to the Northern Donets River in disorder. In early March Manstein's forces then struck the Voronezh Front's forces and recaptured Khar'kov and Belgorod on 16 and 18 March. In addition to thwarting the Soviet's ambitious offensive, Manstein's counterstroke produced utter consternation within the *Stavka*. To forestall further defeat, the *Stavka* transferred fresh forces into the Kursk and Belgorod regions, which, with deteriorating weather, forced Manstein Germans to postpone further action. During this period the Germans also abandoned their Demiansk and Rzhev salients in order to create a more defensible front. The legacy of combat during this period was the infamous Kursk Bulge, which protruded westward into German defenses in the central sector of the Soviet-German front.

So described, the conventional view of the winter campaign of 1942-43 includes the following major military operations:

- **The Soviet Stalingrad Offensive, Operation Uranus (19 November-1942-2 February 1943)**
- **Soviet Operation Little Saturn (16-30 December 1942)**
- **The Krasnodar-Novorossiisk Offensive (11 January-24 May 1943)**
- **The Soviet Kotel'nikovskii Defense and Offensive (12-30 December 1942)**
- **The Soviet Siniavino Offensive, Operation "Spark" (12-30 January 1943)**
- **The Soviet Ostrogozhsk-Rossosh' Offensive (13-27 January 1943)**
- **The Soviet Voronezh-Kastornoe Offensive (24 January-5 February 1943)**
- **The Soviet Donbas Offensive (1-20 February 1943)**
- **The Soviet Khar'kov Offensive (2-26 February 1943)**
- **The Soviet Rostov Offensive (1 January-18 February 1943)**
- **Manstein's Donbas and Khar'kov Counterstokes (20 February-23 March 1943)**
- **The Demiansk Offensive (15 February-1 March 1943)**
- **The Rzhev-Viaz'ma Offensive (2 March-1 April 1943)**

The Forgotten War

This conventional account of action during the winter campaign overlooks several major Red Army offensives, overemphasizes the Red Army's achievements at Demiansk and Rzhev, and distorts both Stalin's and the *Stavka's* strategic intent in the winter of 1943. First, in mid-November 1942, the Red Army struck back at the Germans along virtually every major strategic axis along the Soviet-German Front. In addition to Operation Uranus at Stalingrad, the Red Army's Kalinin and Western Fronts, operating under Zhukov's direct control, struck hard at Army Group Center's defenses along the equally vital western axis in Operation Mars. On 24 November the Kalinin Front's 3rd Shock Army attacked the defenses of Army Group Center's Third Panzer Army's at Velikie Luki and, the next day, five more of Zhukov's armies (the 41st, 22nd, 39th, 31st, 20th, and 29th) attacked the defenses of Army Group Center's Ninth Army around the entire periphery of Rzhev salient, which Germans and Soviets still recognized as "a dagger aimed at Moscow." Finally, on 28 November the Northwestern Front's forces assaulted the defenses of Army Group North's Sixteenth Army around the infamous Demiansk salient.

By mid-December, after Zhukov's offensive in the north had failed, the *Stavka* shifted its attention to the south, where it exploited the success the Red Army had achieved at Stalingrad. Encouraged by the offensive progress its forces recorded in late December and January, in early February 1943, the *Stavka* planned additional multiple simultaneous offensive operations along the northwestern, western, and central axes aimed at nothing short of the complete defeat of all three German army groups and a broad-front advance to the eastern borders of the Baltic states and Belorussia, and the Dnepr River line to the Black Sea. Collectively, these operations formed the Briansk-

Smolensk strategic offensive and Operation Polar Star. Taken together, the *Stavka's* four strategic offensives involved the forces of virtually every Red Army *front* operating across the entire expanse of the Soviet-German front from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea.

Thus, the forgotten battles during this period include:

- **Soviet Operation Mars: The Rzhev-Sychevka Offensive (25 November-20 December 1942)**
- **The Soviet Orel, Briansk, and Smolensk Offensives (5 February-28 March 1943)**
- **Soviet Operation Polar Star (15 February-19 March 1943)**

All three of these forgotten battles were massive in proportion and had imposing strategic aims. The first, code-named Operation Mars (officially, the Rzhev-Sychevka offensive) was a companion piece to Operation Uranus. Zhukov orchestrated the offensive during the period from 25 November through 20 December 1942 in concert with operations against *Wehrmacht* forces at Demiansk and Velikie Luki, and the objective of Operation Mars was to destroy German Ninth Army and, if possible, most of Army Group Center. Although Operation Mars failed, it so seriously weakened German forces in the region that, several months later, Hitler authorized German forces to withdraw from the Rzhev salient. After Zhukov's offensive failed, it was almost completely forgotten, in part to preserve the general's lofty reputation.

The second major forgotten Red Army offensive was the Orel, Briansk, and Smolensk offensive of February and March 1943. Conducted by the Briansk, Western, and new Central Front, the offensive was aimed at collapsing German defenses in central Russia and driving *Wehrmacht* forces back the Dnepr River. It failed largely due to excessively hasty regrouping of Red Army forces, inadequate logistical support, poor coordination, deteriorating weather conditions, and the success of Manstein's Donbas and Khar'kov counterstrokes. In fact, the impact of Manstein's counterstrokes was so immense for German fortunes that they had the strategic effect of a full-fledged counteroffensive. During this offensive, Soviet forces advanced as far west as the Desna River. When they withdrew, their new positions formed the northern and western perimeter of the Kursk Bulge.

The third major forgotten Red Army offensive was Operation Polar Star, an attempt by the Northwestern, Leningrad, and Volkhov Fronts to raise the siege of Leningrad and liberate all of southern Leningrad region to the eastern border of the Soviet Union's Baltic republics. Planned and directed by Zhukov, the operation involved the penetration of Army Group North's defenses in the Staraia Russa region, the liquidation of the Demiansk salient, and a large-scale exploitation by sizable armored forces to Narva and Pskov to encircle and destroy Army Group North's south of Leningrad and liberate the city. Although Zhukov chose the indirect approach by making his main attack with the Northwestern Front from the Staraia Russa region to avoid further costly operations in the immediate vicinity of Leningrad, both the Leningrad and Volkhov Fronts supported the Northwestern Front by conducting offensives of their own in the Leningrad region.

However, Operation Polar Star failed largely because the Germans abandoned the Demiansk salient on the eve of the offensive, and, more importantly, because the *Stavka* deprived Zhukov of his tank army (the 1st), which it dispatched south to counter Manstein's threatening counterstrokes. Despite Zhukov' failure, Operation Polar Star became a dress rehearsal for the January 1944 offensive that ultimately liberated Leningrad.

In addition to these three major "forgotten" offensive operations, certain aspects of other "known" offensives remain neglected or entirely forgotten. For example, history informs us that the Southwestern Front alone conducted the ill-fated Donbas offensive in February 1943. In reality, however, the Southern Front also took part in the offensive, spectacularly losing up to two mobile corps in the process. Finally, the fighting associated with the German withdrawal from the Demiansk and Rzhev salients, whose ferocity Russian historians have exaggerated, also requires further detailed study and analysis.

Reflections

By consistently ignoring, overlooking, or minimizing the importance of these forgotten operations during the winter campaign of 1942-43, historians have perpetuated several enduring myths about the Red Army and its strategic leadership during the war. The first of these myths is that Stalin and the *Stavka's* ability to select the proper strategic axes along which to mount their main attacks during this campaign markedly improved. This myth claims that Stalin and the *Stavka* had not yet learned the art of strategic concentration during 1941 and the first half of 1942. Thus, in the Battle of Moscow and in early 1942, they congenitally tried to accomplish too much by attacking along virtually every strategic axis, thereby dissipating the Red Army's strength. This myth goes on to argue that, beginning in November 1942 and thereafter, Stalin and his advisers took care to concentrate the Red Army's offensive efforts along one major axis, specifically the southwestern axis, throughout the duration of the campaign. As a corollary to this argument, they argue that all other offensive operations were essentially diversionary in nature. Further, historians argue that Stalin and his chief military advisers adhered strictly to this strategic behavior throughout the remainder of the war.

This myth and its corollaries are patently incorrect. It is now quite clear that, until the summer of 1944, Stalin and his principal military advisers continued to believe that the best strategy was to deliver decisive blows against defending *Wehrmacht* forces simultaneously along several strategic axes. This is precisely what Stalin did in November 1942, when he authorized the twin operations Mars and Uranus, and in February and March 1943, when he ordered the Red Army to conduct simultaneous multiple *front* operations along the entire breadth of the Soviet-German front. Furthermore, Stalin would adhere to this pattern virtually until war's end, although beginning in the summer of 1944 he ordered the Red Army to launch multiple offensives along differing axes with overlapping starting times.

The second myth relates to the duration of Red Army operations. It argues that Stalin and the *Stavka* displayed considerable offensive restraint by gradually formulating

offensive objectives that were within the Red Army's capacity to achieve. As the winter campaign of 1942-43 and future major Red Army offensives indicated, this myth too is false. As had been the case at Moscow the year before, in the winter of 1942-43 Stalin's offensive expectations far exceeded the Red Army's actual capabilities. Inspired by his November victory at Stalingrad and emboldened by its subsequent seemingly endless series of offensive successes, Stalin broadened his initial strategic aim of destroying only German forces in southern Russia to encompass the destruction of all three German army groups operating in the East. Unfortunately, the Red Army's soldiers inevitably paid a bloody price for Stalin's over-ambition. In short, Stalin and the *Stavka* still had to master the art of the possible in terms of establishing realistic aims and in planning and conducting large-scale offensive operations.

It was no coincidence then that, when he planned the Red Army's strategic offensive operations in the summer of 1943 and the spring of 1944, Stalin would recall the opportunities he had lost in the winter of 1942-43 and plan accordingly. These plans also called for the Red Army to conduct multiple strategic offensives along several strategic axes, offensives that required the Red Army to fulfill missions, which tested the very limits of its endurance.

Historical Debates

- Stalin's Strategic Intent in November 1942

In Operation Uranus (the Stalingrad counteroffensive), which began on 19 November 1942, Red Army forces penetrated Rumanian defenses north and south of Stalingrad, linked up near Kalach in the German rear, and encircled or destroyed 300,000 Axis troops in and around the city of Stalingrad. Historians consider this feat, which paved the way for the complete destruction of German Sixth Army in Stalingrad by 2 February 1943 and prompted the *Stavka* to expand the counteroffensive into a full-fledged winter offensive, to be the most important Red Army victory in the Soviet-German War. The same historians view the Stalingrad counteroffensive as the centerpiece of Stalin's military strategy in late 1942 and stark evidence that both he and the *Stavka* had irrevocably abandoned the "broad front" strategy that had caused the Red Army's Moscow counteroffensive and winter campaign the year before to fall short of achieving their objectives.

Russian and German archival evidence now clearly demonstrates that both of these contentions are incorrect. In fact, on 25 November (after an unforeseen delay caused by bad weather), the *Stavka* launched Operation Mars against Army Group Center's defenses west of Moscow. The Mars offensive, which involved forces comparable in strength to those the Red Army employed to conduct Operation Uranus at Stalingrad, lasted until 20 December 1942. Although the attacking forces penetrated German positions and almost collapsed German defenses around the Rzhev salient, the offensive ultimately failed with heavy losses. Thereafter, Russian historians obscured its very existence, and it languished in utter obscurity, in part to protect Zhukov's reputation.

When Operation Mars was rediscovered, Russian historians simply shrugged it off as a diversionary operation conducted to draw German attention and reserves away from Stalingrad. Even if this were the case, which it is not, this offensive would have been the largest and bloodiest diversion in the annals of military history.

In addition, Operation Mars and other forgotten operations that the Red Army conducted along the Soviet-German front during the winter of 1942-43 clearly indicate that Stalin and the *Stavka* still adhered to a "broad front" military strategy throughout the winter campaign.

- The Rescue of Sixth Army

For years, historians have heatedly debated the feasibility and relative importance of German attempts to relieve the Sixth and Fourth Panzer Armies encircled in Stalingrad. Many have claimed that the relief would have been successful had Hitler permitted General Paulus (the Sixth Army commander) to withdraw from Stalingrad or had Paulus decided to break out of encirclement on his own volition before his army was destroyed. Evidence now indicates that both assertions are incorrect.

In early December 1942, shortly after Paulus' forces were encircled, Hitler appointed Manstein to command Army Group Don, (formed on 20 November) and ordered him to relieve Paulus' force by mounting thrusts toward Stalingrad by two panzer corps from the west and southwest. In early and mid-December, however, the Red Army launched twin offensives against German and Italian forces defending along the Chir and Don Rivers, which diverted German forces (XXXXVIII Panzer Corps) from their relief attempt and ultimately destroyed the Italian Eighth Army, smashing Axis defenses northwest of Stalingrad. Soon after, the *Stavka* deployed its powerful 2nd Guards Army to the region southwest of Stalingrad and employed it to defend and then counterattack against the second German relief force (by the LVI Panzer Corps). The commitment of this powerful reserve force, coupled with the inherent weakness of Paulus' army, ensured defeat of the second German relief attempt and led to the subsequent rapid Red Army offensive toward Rostov.

- The Full Extent of the Soviet Winter Offensive

Historians have recorded that, after its victory at Stalingrad, the Red Army embarked on a winter campaign aimed at collapsing German defenses in southern Russia. While some have treated the campaign as an unpremeditated advance that took advantage of the deteriorating German situation in the south, others have claimed that the ultimate *Stavka* aim was to advance the Red Army's forces forward to the Dnepr River in the sector from Kremenchug southward to the Black Sea. Neither of these interpretations, however, captures the *Stavka's* full intent during the winter campaign because neither takes into account two major forgotten offensives that occurred during the final stages of the winter campaign.

In reality, in February 1943 Stalin and the *Stavka* ordered the Red Army to launch two major strategic offensives in addition to those being conducted toward Khar'kov and into the Donbas region. The first of these offensives, Operation Polar Star, was aimed at

the destruction of Army Group North, and the second, the Orel-Briansk-Smolensk offensive, was designed to defeat Army Group Center. Taken together, the three offensives sought to drive *Wehrmacht* forces back to the Narva, Pskov, Vitebsk, and Dnepr River line by the end of the winter campaign. The failure of these offensives in March 1943 left the imposing Kursk Bulge as a legacy of what Stalin hoped to accomplish in these massive offensives.

Further, historians have also underestimated the scope, power, and intended goals of the Red Army's Khar'kov and Donbas offensives. Contrary to existing interpretations, in addition to the Voronezh and Southwestern Fronts, the Southern Front also played an active role in the offensives. Finally, the Red Army's three massive offensives refute the assertion that Stalin and the *Stavka* conducted offensives on only a relatively narrow front in the winter of 1943. On the contrary, during the winter both adhered to the "broad front" strategy that they had espoused since the beginning of the war.

- The Impact of von Manstein's February Counterstroke

Many historians have maintained that Manstein's counterstrokes on the Donbas and at Khar'kov in February and March 1943 were responsible for reversing German fortunes in southern Russia and restoring stability to the German Eastern Front after the catastrophic defeats the *Wehrmacht* suffered at and west of Stalingrad. Others have asserted that Hitler should have permitted Manstein to continue his counterstrokes in March and April and, if he had done so, that Manstein's success would have prevented the subsequent German defeat at Kursk in July 1943. While the first assertion is basically correct, the historians who make it have vastly underestimated the scope and importance of Manstein's victory. The second assertion, however, is seriously flawed.

In addition to ending the Red Army's hopes for achieving victory in southern Russia in the winter of 1942-43, Manstein's counterstrokes, together with skillful German actions elsewhere along the front, seriously disrupted the Red Army's two ambitious strategic offensives along the northwestern and central strategic axis. In essence, his counterstrokes prevented the entire German Eastern Front from collapsing by drawing significant Red Army forces from other critical axes. Therefore, in terms of its scope, impact, and importance, Manstein's counterstrokes had an effect equivalent to a full-fledged successful strategic offensive. As a result, it would take another major campaign and six months of heavy fighting for the Red Army's forces to achieve the missions that the *Stavka* assigned to them in February 1943.

In the final analysis, Manstein's forces achieved all that they could have achieved during his counteroffensive. The combination of strong reinforcements the *Stavka* dispatched to the Kursk region, most of which Manstein's counteroffensive drew to the region from the northwestern and central axes, and the deteriorating weather associated with the spring *rasputitsa* totally negated the potential success of any expanded German offensive in the Kursk region. In short, further German offensive operations were likely to produce new defeats, thereby squandering much of the gains of Manstein's successful February and March operations.

- The Battle of Stalingrad as a "Turning Point"

In comparison with the Battles of Moscow and Kursk, the Battle of Stalingrad was indeed the most important "turning point" in the Soviet-German War. The Red Army's success in the counteroffensive and during the ensuing winter offensive clearly indicated that Germany could no longer win the war on any terms.

This fact was underscored by the grim reality that, at Stalingrad and during its subsequent offensives, the Red Army accomplished the unprecedented feat of encircling and destroying the bulk of two German armies (the Sixth and Fourth Panzer), and destroying or severely damaging one more German army (the Second) and four Allied armies (the Third and Fourth Rumanian, Eighth Italian, and Second Hungarian). In the future, the Axis could neither replace these armies nor conduct successful offensive without them.

THE SUMMER-FALL CAMPAIGN, JUNE-DECEMBER 1943

Context

A COMPARATIVE CHRONOLOGY OF OPERATIONS ON THE EASTERN AND WESTERN FRONTS DURING THE SUMMER-FALL CAMPAIGN OF 1943

- **In July 1943 160,000 U.S. and British forces invaded Sicily, defeated 60,000 German defenders, and advanced into southern Italy. The Germans lost 20,000 men and the Allies 22,000.**
- **During July and August 1943, the 2.5 million Red Army troops defeated over 1 million Germans at Kursk and subsequently launched offensives by over 6 million Red Army soldiers against 2.5 million Germans along a front of over 1,500 miles and advanced toward the Dnepr River.**

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- **In October and November 1943 in Italy, 11 Allied divisions advanced 16-39 miles from the Volturno River line to Cassino against 9 German divisions.**
- **From October through November 1943, 6 Red Army *fronts* with 37 armies, over 4 million men, and over 300 divisions assaulted German defenses in a 770-mile sector in Belorussia, at Kiev, and along the lower Dnepr River, piercing the German Eastern Wall in four regions.**

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- **On 31 December 1943, U.S. Army strength in Europe reached 1.4 million men and 17 divisions. Red Army strength reached 6.2 million men and over 500 divisions.**

The Conventional View

The summer of 1943 was a pivotal period for both the *Wehrmacht* and the Red Army. By this time, operations in the Soviet-German War had evolved into a clear pattern of alternating but qualified strategic successes by both sides. While the *Wehrmacht* proved its offensive prowess in Operations Barbarossa and *Blau*, at the culminating point of each of these offensives it faltered in the face of unanticipated Red Army strength and tenacity, the rigors of Russian weather, and the deterioration of their own forces and logistical support. Similarly, the Red Army successfully halted both German offensives short of their objectives, mounted effective counteroffensives, and was then able to expand these counteroffensives into massive winter campaigns that stretched German strategic defenses to the breaking point. In both cases, however, the *Wehrmacht's* defenses bent but did not break. The Germans ultimately frustrated the *Stavka's* strategic offensive ambitions through a combination of their own over-optimism, the unanticipated tenacity of *Wehrmacht* troops, and vexing spring thaws.

By the summer of 1943, two years of war experience indicated that the German "owned" the summers and the Soviets the winters. By this time, both sides realized that this strategic pattern was a prescription for stalemate, a situation that frustrated the strategic aspirations of both sides. German frustration was the greatest for good reason, since by mid-1943 Germany was waging a world war in an increasing number of continental and oceanic theaters. Not only was it bogged down in Russia, but it was also waging a U-boat war in the Atlantic, countering an Allied air offensive over the German Homeland, fighting a ground war in North Africa, and defending the French and Norwegian coasts against the threat of a "second front." Therefore, circumstances indicated that Germany's success in the war, if not her overall fate, depended on the course of the war in the East and dictated that the *Wehrmacht* achieve the sort of victory in the East that would exhaust the Soviets and prompt them to negotiate a separate peace on whatever terms possible. To do so, Hitler decided to launch his third major strategic offensive of the war, code-named Operation Citadel, in the more restricted sector at Kursk.

Stalin and the *Stavka* also faced serious, though less daunting, challenges in the summer of 1943. Even though the Red Army had inflicted unprecedented defeats on the *Wehrmacht* and its allies during the previous winter, German forces ultimately managed to stabilize the front. To achieve more, that is to defeat the *Wehrmacht* and drive it from Russian soil, the Red Army had to prove it could defeat the *Wehrmacht* in the summer as well as the winter. To do so Stalin and the *Stavka* resolved to begin the summer-fall campaign by conducting a deliberate defense of the Kursk Bulge, where the German attack was most likely to occur. Once the Germans were halted, it decided to launch a series of counterstrokes in the Kursk region and, subsequently, expand the offensive to the flanks. The *Stavka's* ultimate aim was to project Red Army forces to the Dnepr River and, if possible, to expand the offensive into Belorussia and the Ukraine.

Subsequently, the summer-fall campaign developed in three distinct stages: specifically, the Battle of Kursk, the advance to the Dnepr River; and the struggle for possession of bridgeheads across the Dnepr (See Map 5). During the first stage, which lasted from 5 to 23 July, the Red Army's Central and Voronezh Fronts, supported by elements of the Steppe Front, defeated Army Groups Center's and South's Ninth and Fourth Panzer Armies and Army Detachment Kempf, which were attacking the flanks of the Kursk salient in Operation Citadel. Before the fighting at Kursk ended, on 12 July the Western, Briansk, and Central Fronts attacked and defeated Army Group Center's Second Panzer Army, whose forces were defending the Orel salient, in Operation Kutuzov. Before the fighting at Orel ended on 18 August, on 3 August the Voronezh and Steppe Fronts assaulted and defeated Army Group South's Fourth Panzer Army and Army Detachment Kempf, which were defending south of the Kursk Bulge, in Operation Rumiantsev and liberated Belgorod and Khar'kov by 23 August.

On the flanks of this massive offensive, 2 August through 2 October, the Kalinin and Western Fronts drove Army Group Center's Third Panzer and Fourth Armies westward and, in stages, liberated Spas-Demensk, El'nia, Roslavl', and Smolensk in Operation Suvorov. While the Smolensk offensive was still unfolding, from 17-26

August, the Briansk Front defeated Army Group Center's Ninth Army in the Briansk region in the Briansk operation, and, to the south, from 13 August through 22 September, the Southwestern and Southern Fronts defeated Army Group South defending the Donbas region in the Donbas operation and advanced to the outskirts of Zaporozh'e and Melitopol'. Simultaneously, the North Caucasus Front's forces drove German troops

Map 5. The Summer-Fall Campaign of 1943.

from the Krasnodar region in the northern Caucasus into the Taman' Peninsula during the Novorossiisk-Taman' operation.

Once it became apparent to the *Stavka* that victory was at hand at Kursk, it ordered the Red Army to continue its offensive toward the Dnepr River along the Kursk-Kiev and Kursk-Kremenchug axes. Beginning on 26 August, the Central, Voronezh, and Steppe Fronts commenced multiple offensives, known collectively as the Chernigov-Poltava operation, which drove Army Group South's Second, Fourth Panzer, and Eighth Armies back to the line of the Dnepr River by late September. By 30 September the Red Army's forces had reached the banks of the Dnepr River on a broad front from north of Kiev to the approaches to Dnepropetrovsk in the south. During the final stages of this advance, Soviet forces captured small but vital bridgeheads over the river south of Gomel', near Chernobyl' and Liutezh north of Kiev, at Bukrin south of Kiev, and south of Kremenchug.

During the second half of October, the Belorussian (formerly Central) and 1st Ukrainian (formerly Voronezh) Fronts consolidated their footholds over the Dnepr River, and the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian (formerly Steppe and Southwestern) Fronts cleared *Wehrmacht* forces from the eastern bank of the Dnepr, captured the cities of Dnepropetrovsk and Zaporozh'e, and established bridgeheads on the river's western bank. Meanwhile, the 4th Ukrainian (formerly Southern) Front seized Melitopol' and the territory between the Dnepr River and the approaches to the Crimea.

According to most accounts, the third stage of the Red Army's summer-fall offensive commenced in early November when the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts attacked from their bridgeheads across the Dnepr. From 3 through 13 November, the 1st Ukrainian Front struck from the Liutezh bridgehead north of Kiev, captured Kiev, Fastov, and Zhitomir from Army Group South's Fourth Panzer Army, and secured a strategic-scale bridgehead west of the Ukrainian capital. Thereafter, from 13 November through 23 December, it defended this bridgehead against fierce German counterstrokes orchestrated by Manstein.

At the same time, the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts assaulted across the Dnepr River south of Kremenchug and Dnepropetrovsk but failed to capture their objective of Krivoi Rog from Army Group South's defending Eighth and First Panzer Armies. For the next two months, the two *fronts* managed to expand their bridgehead, primarily to the west, while the 4th Ukrainian Front besieged elements of the new German Sixth Army in the Nikopol' bridgehead east of the Dnepr River. Finally, in late December the reinforced 1st Ukrainian Front attacked toward Berdichev and Vinnitsa in the Zhitomir-Berdichev operation, an offensive against Army Group South's Fourth Panzer Army that continued well into the New Year.

Most histories of the war argue that, throughout the entire fall period, the *Stavka* accorded strategic priority to the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts' operations along the southwestern axis into the Ukraine. Unlike previous campaigns, they argue, the *Stavka* concentrated its efforts along this single strategic axis rather than dissipating the Red Army's strength by conducting in numerous offensives along several strategic axes. Thus, the offensive operations that occurred along any other axes were clearly secondary in

importance and only supporting in nature. These secondary operations took place near Nevel' and Gomel' in October, near Nevel' and Rechitsa in November, and near Gorodok and west of Rechitsa in December.

Thus, the conventional view of the summer-fall campaign of 1943 includes the following major military operations:

- **German Operation Citadel and the Defensive Battle of Kursk (5-23 July 1943)**
- **The Soviet Orel Offensive (Operation Kutuzov) (12 July-18 August 1943)**
- **The Soviet Belgorod-Khar'kov Offensive (Operation Rumiantsev) (3-23 August 1943)**
- **The Soviet Smolensk Offensive (Operation Suvorov) (7 August-2 October 1943)**
- **The Soviet Briansk Offensive (1 September-3 October 1943)**
- **The Soviet Chernigov-Poltava Offensive (The Red Army Advance to the Dnepr River) (26 August-30 September 1943)**
- **The Soviet Donbas Offensive (13 August-22 September)**
- **The Soviet Melitopol' Offensive (26 September-5 November 1943)**
- **The Soviet Novorossiisk-Taman' Offensive (10 September-9 October 1943)**
- **The Soviet Nevel'-Gorodok Offensive (6 October-31 December 1943)**
- **The Soviet Gomel-Rechitsa Offensive (10-30 November 1943)**
- **The Soviet Kiev Offensive (3-13 November 1943)**
- **The Soviet Lower Dnepr Offensive (26 September-20 December 1943)**
- **Manstein's Kiev Counterstrokes (13 November-22 December 1943)**
- **The Soviet Zhitomir-Berdichev Offensive (24 December 1943-14 January 1944)**

The Forgotten War

Although existing histories cover the Battle of Kursk and the Battle for the Dnepr River in exhaustive detail, yawning gaps still exist in the historical record of this important campaign. While larger and more famous battles going on at the time overshadowed many of these forgotten operations, Russian historians have deliberately neglected others, most of which occurred when an over-optimistic *Stavka* once again tested the operational limits of Red Army forces. As was the case in earlier wartime campaigns, in the summer and fall of 1943, the *Stavka* assigned overly ambitious missions to its forces in mid and late 1943, missions which its operating *fronts* and armies simply could not carry out. In fairness to the *Stavka*, however, its excessive optimism also indicated that it was pursuing the entirely valid principle of attempting to exploit every strategic success to the maximum extent possible.

In addition, contrary to persistent postwar assertions that Stalin and the *Stavka* concentrated the Red Army's efforts on a single strategic axis, specifically along the southwestern axis into the Ukraine, in reality, the *Stavka* once again ordered the Red Army to conduct strategic offensives along multiple axes during each and every stage of

the campaign. Thus, during each stage, the Red Army launched major offensives along the western, southwestern, and southern axes and operations of lesser importance along the northwestern and Caucasus axes.

The forgotten battles that took place during the Red Army's summer-fall campaign include:

- **The Soviet Taman' Offensive (4 April-10 May, 26 May-2 August 1943)**
- **The Soviet Donbas Offensive (Izium-Barvenkovo and the Mius River)(17 July-2 August 1943)**
- **The Soviet Siniavino Offensive (15-18 September 1943)**
- **The Soviet Belorussian Offensive (Vitebsk, Orsha, Gomel, and Bobruisk) (3 October-31 December 1943)**
- **The Soviet Kiev Offensive (1-24 October 1943)**
- **The Soviet Krivoi-Rog and Nikopol' Offensives (14 November-31 December 1943)**

The first three of these forgotten operations were either constituent parts or continuations of larger offensive operations. The North Caucasus Taman' offensive was actually an extension of the better-known Krasnodar offensive operation (9 February-24 May 1943), the final spring operation designed to clear German forces from the northern Caucasus region. It took the form of a prolonged series of unsuccessful assaults designed to smash German Seventeenth Army's fortified defenses around the towns of Krymskaia and Moldavanskoe, bastions that anchored Hitler's bridgehead in the Taman' region. For a time, Zhukov was in direct charge of this offensive operation.

The Southwestern and Southern Fronts' Izium-Barvenkovo and Mius River offensives of July 1943 in the Donbas were integral elements of the Battle of Kursk. The Red Army's short but violent assaults in the two regions were designed either to distract German attention and reserves from the Kursk region (as the Soviets claim) or genuine attempts to collapse German defenses in the region. In either case, Russian historians have studiously avoided the subject, preferring instead to cover in detail the August 1943 versions of these operations. As for the Siniavino offensive, this was yet another furious Red Army assault on Army Group North's defenses at and around Siniavino Heights, a German strongpoint that had eluded Soviet capture for over two years. Although the assaulting forces seized the heights, as with many of the six earlier attempts to seize the region, Russian historians have studiously ignored the costly battle.

By far the most dramatic forgotten offensives to occur during the summer-fall campaign were the large-scale Red Army attempts to penetrate into Belorussia and the Ukraine in the fall of 1943. Even though the twin offensives were among the most important that the Red Army conducted in the fall, Russian historians have totally ignored the former and have covered only the successful November stage of the latter.

In brief, in late September 1943, the *Stavka* ordered the Kalinin, Western, Briansk, and Central Fronts to penetrate German Army Group Center's defenses across the expanse of their front and advance to capture Minsk and most of Belorussia. The ensuing

Belorussian strategic offensive lasted for over three months and involved heavy fighting, particularly along the Dnepr River and on the approaches to Vitebsk, Orsha, and Bobruisk. Although historians have written about fragments of this massive offensive under the rubric of the Nevel' and Gomel-Rechitsa operations, no works detail the full extent and ambitious intent of the offensive. Worse still, historians have totally ignored the Western Front's many costly and futile offensives against German Fourth Army's defenses in eastern Belorussia.

Similarly, historians have literally erased from the historical record the Kiev strategic offensive, a bitter struggle in October 1943 conducted by the Voronezh Front and Central Front's left wing to seize a strategic scale bridgehead in the Kiev region west of the Dnepr River. For three weeks during October, six Voronezh Front armies (the 38th, 60th, 40th, 3rd Guards Tank, 27th, and 47th), in concert with two armies on the Central Front's left wing (the 13th and 60th), waged intense and costly combat in the Chernobyl', Gornostaipol', Liutezh, and Bukrin regions against Army Group South's Fourth Panzer and Eighth Armies to expand bridgeheads seized in September and capture Kiev. All of the operations failed, only to be overshadowed by the Voronezh Front's subsequent offensive in November 1943 that captured Kiev.

While the Kiev offensive raged on, in November and December 1943, the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Ukrainian Fronts conducted the equally frustrating Krivoi Rog-Nikopol' offensive aimed at clearing the forces of Army Group South's First Panzer and Seventeenth Armies from the region of the lower Don River. Although the three *fronts* repeatedly tried to revive their offensives and, in the process, seriously dented German defenses in several sectors, the defenses held, and both Krivoi Rog and Nikopol' remained in German hands until early 1944.

Reflections

The vast struggle that took place along the Soviet-German front during the summer and fall campaign of 1943 was far more complex than either German or Soviet historians have recorded. Although Russian accounts are generally accurate as far as they go, they are also woefully simplistic and starkly incomplete. If the Red Army's victories from July to December 1943 were indeed real, so also were its failures and defeats. In short, while most Soviet victories before the summer of 1943 were accompanied by major or minor failures, after the summer of 1943, virtually every Red Army strategic and operational victory was either preceded by or followed by a complete or partial failure. However, it was relatively easy for both sides to either conceal or overlook these failures and defeats within the context of those more spectacular Red Army victories.

Consequently, the Southwestern and Southern Fronts' defeats at Izium and along the Mius River in mid-July 1943 were overshadowed by the Red Army's victory at Kursk in July and August and by its victories at Izium and along the Mius River in August. The same pattern persisted elsewhere. The North Caucasus Front's defeats in the Taman' region from May through August 1943 were wedged in between and concealed by the successful Krasnodar offensive in early 1943 and the equally successful Novorossiisk-Taman' offensive in the fall of 1943.

Likewise, the failure of the Kalinin, Western, and Central Fronts to defeat Army Group Center in Belorussian during the fall was, in part, masked by the spectacular Smolensk, Briansk, and Chernigov victories that preceded it in late summer 1943 and by the dramatically successful Belorussian offensive (Operation Bagration) the Red Army conducted in June 1944. In this case, unlike the other strategic setbacks, while Soviet and Russian historians could and did write about operations imbedded in separate sectors of this grand offensive, such as the victories as at Nevel' and Gomel', they largely ignored the overarching strategic failure.

Similarly, historians were able to ignore the Central and Voronezh Fronts' signal offensive failures on the approaches to Kiev in October 1943 in light of the Red Army's more spectacular capture of Kiev and a strategic bridgehead across the Dnepr River in early November 1943. Furthermore, historians were able to mask the bloody battles fought during November and December 1943 by the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Ukrainian Fronts along the approaches to Krivoi Rog and against the Nikopol' bridgehead. In this case, the historians focused on both the more dramatic and successful operations taking place at Kiev and on the successful Kirovograd and Nikopol'-Krivoi Rog offensives, which the three *fronts* conducted in January 1944.

In fact, a strong case can be made that every major victory the Red Army achieved after it breached German defenses along the Sozh and Dnepr Rivers in September 1943 was preceded by at least one major defeat in the same region. This was certainly the case regarding Red Army operations on the Taman' Peninsula and in the Donbas, along the Mius River, at Vitebsk and Bobruisk in Belorussia, and at Kiev, Krivoi Rog, and Nikopol'. This pattern would persist in 1944 and 1945.

Historical Debates

- <u>The Timing, Wisdom, and Feasibility of Hitler's Operation Citadel</u>

Historians have either questioned Hitler's judgment in deciding to launch Operation Citadel in the first place or have criticized his decision to terminate the offensive prematurely before it had achieved its potential success. While they are probably correct on the first count, they are clearly mistaken on the second.

First, for the reasons cited above, it would have been foolhardy for Hitler to begin Operation Citadel in March or April 1943. Furthermore, Hitler needed the additional time from April to July to amass the forces and equipment necessary to guarantee a reasonable change for German success in Citadel. This was particularly vital, since the *Stavka* moved a steady stream of powerful strategic reserves into the Kursk and Voronezh region during March, April, and May. These included the 21st (6th Guards in April), 24th (4th Guards in April), 62nd (8th Guards in April), 63rd, 64th (6th Guards in April), 1st Tank, 27th, 53rd, and 47th Armies.

Second, given the Red Army's strength in the summer of 1943, the depth of Soviet strategic defenses at Kursk and elsewhere along the Soviet-German front, the availability of Red Army strategic reserves, and the easy predictability of a German offensive against the Kursk Bulge, the Red Army victory at Kursk appeared to be, and perhaps was, foreordained. When considered within the context of previous German

offensive operations, however, there was every reason for Hitler and his generals to expect success, at least in the initial assaults on the Kursk Bulge. For the Red Army, it was a sad but genuine fact that, during summer operations, never before had Red Army forces been able to halt a concerted German offensive before *Wehrmacht* forces reached the strategic, much less the operational, depths. This grim fact explains why Stalin and the *Stavka* began the Battle of Kursk with a premeditated defense.

Third, any decision by Hitler to continue his Citadel offensive beyond mid-July would have been sheer folly. By this time, the *Wehrmacht's* Citadel assault force had been severely weakened in two weeks if intense fighting, and vastly superior Red Army forces were assaulting German defenses at Orel and along the Northern Donets and Mius Rivers on the flanks of the Kursk Bulge. The two major Red Army offensives against German defenses on the flanks of the Kursk Bulge tied down *Wehrmacht* forces in these regions and drew critical *Wehrmacht* forces away from the focal point of the fighting at Kursk. Finally, at the very moment Manstein's panzer spearheads were engaging the Voronezh Front's 5th Guards and 5th Guards Tank Armies on the infamous battlefield at Prokhorovka, two fresh Soviet armies (the 27th and 53rd) and two full-strength mobile corps (the 4th Guards Tank and 1st Mechanized) were poised to enter the battle.

- Stalin's "Broad Front" Strategy

Historians have stressed the sequential nature of the Red Army's major strategic offensives in the aftermath of the Battle of Kursk and have argued that, as opposed to its "broad front" strategy of 1941 and early 1942, these successive offensive evidenced continued *Stavka* adherence to the fresh strategy of selecting the most appropriate axes along which to conduct offensive operations. With certain qualifications, this claim is manifestly false.

During the period of expanding Red Army offensives during and after the Battle of Kursk and during the subsequent Red Army advance to the Sozh and Dnepr Rivers, the *Stavka* applied relentless pressure against German defenses along the entire front from the Rzhev region and northern Belorussia to the Black Sea. Thus, by the end of the campaign, nine Red Army *fronts* totaling almost 6 million soldiers were conducting active offensive operations from the Nevel' region to the Black Sea. However, unlike the case in previous Soviet general offensives, in the summer and fall of 1943, the *Stavka* did often stagger the starting dates of these offensives to keep the German High Command off balance and frustrate its ability to shift operational reserves from one sector to another in timely fashion.

- The Battle of Kursk as a "Turning Point"

While the Battle of Stalingrad was the most important "turning point" in the war, the Battle of Kursk also represented a vital turn in German fortunes. In addition to being the last major offensive that offered the Germans any prospect for strategic success, the outcome of the battle proved conclusively that Germany would lose the war. After Kursk the only question that remained to be answered regarded the duration and final cost of the Red Army's inevitable victory.

FORGOTTEN BATTLES AND HISTORICAL DEBATES: THE 3rd PERIOD OF THE WAR

THE WINTER CAMPAIGN, DECEMBER 1943-APRIL 1944

Context:

A COMPARATIVE CHRONOLOGY OF OPERATIONS ON THE EASTERN AND WESTERN FRONTS DURING THE WINTER CAMPAIGN OF 1943-44

- **From January through March 1944, 18 Allied divisions were bogged down at Anzio and Cassino in central Italy against an equal number of German divisions.**
- **From January through March 1944, the Red Army launched massive offensives with 10 *fronts*, 55 armies, over 4.5 million men, and over 300 divisions and liberated the Leningrad region, penetrated Belorussia, and reached the Polish and Rumanian borders. The assaults badly damaged 3 German Army groups and inflicted over 1 million casualties on the *Wehrmacht*.**

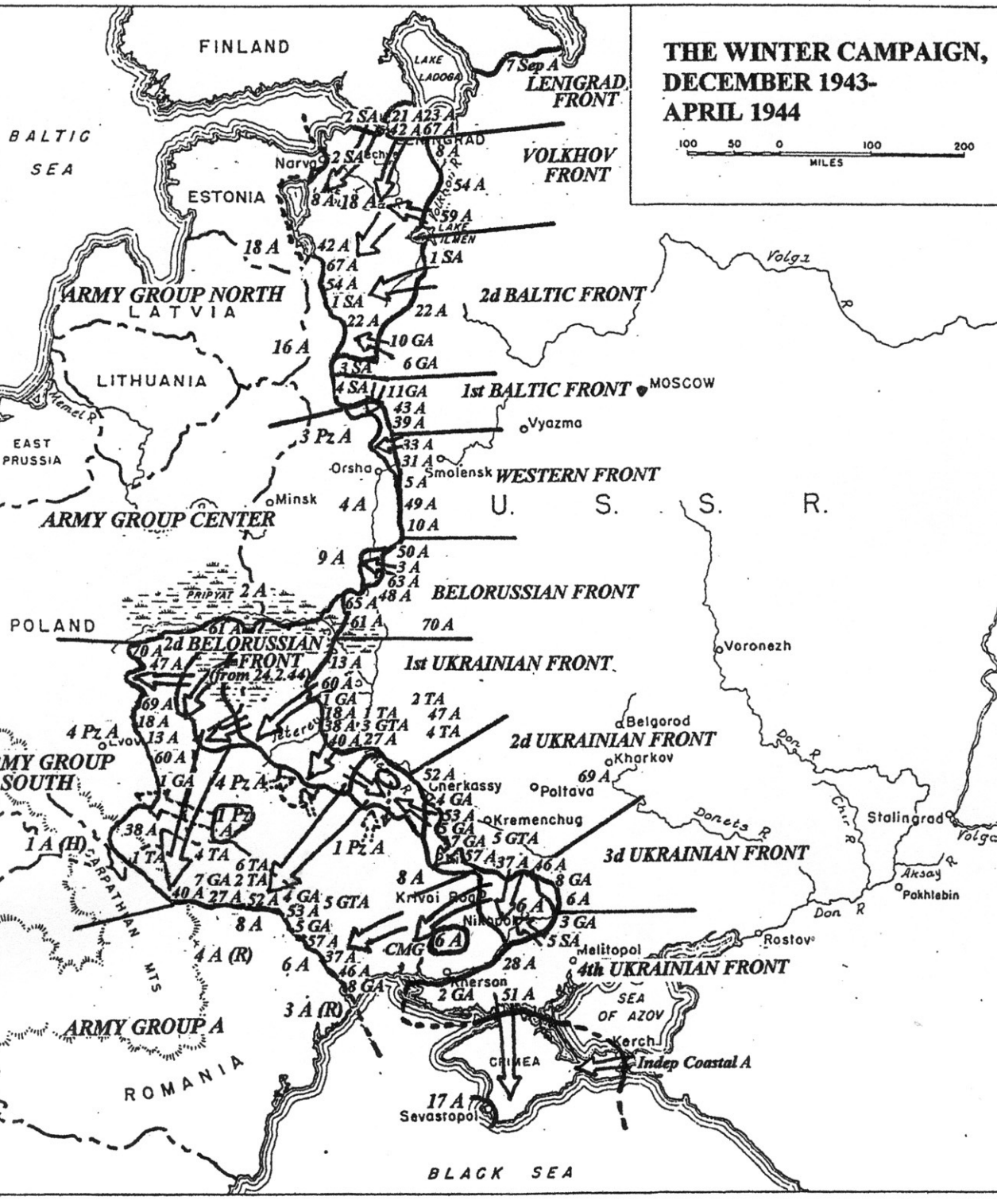
The Conventional View

In early December 1943, the *Stavka* formulated strategic plans for the conduct of its third winter campaign, which required the Red Army to drive Army Group North's forces from the Leningrad region and Army Group South's forces from the Ukraine and the Crimea and to create favorable conditions for the subsequent destruction of Army Group Center's forces in Belorussia. The Red Army's 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Ukrainian Fronts were to conduct the main effort in the Ukraine first by attacking successively and later simultaneously. This permitted the *Stavka* to switch key artillery and mechanized resources from *front* to *front*, while concealing the true scope and intent of the offensive.

The first phase of the Red Army's offensive in the Ukraine, which began in late December 1943 and lasted through late February 1944, consisted of five major offensive operations, each conducted by one or two *fronts* against Manstein's Army Group South (See Map 6). The first two operations, which the 1st and 2nd Ukrainian Fronts conducted, were continuations of the earlier operations designed to expand the Red Army's bridgeheads across the Dnepr River. On 24 December 1943 General N. F. Vatutin's 1st Ukrainian Front attacked from its bridgehead at Kiev toward Zhitomir, Berdichev, and Vinnitsa in the Zhitomir-Berdichev offensive. Although Army Group South's Fourth and First Panzer Army (the latter was transferred to this region on 1 January) were hard-

pressed to contain the offensive, a counterstroke by Manstein's panzer corps (the III, XXXXVI, and XXXXVIII) halted the *front's* two exploiting tank armies (the 1st and 3rd

Map 6. The Winter Campaign of 1943-44.



Guards) just short of their objective Vinnitsa. Meanwhile, from 5-16 January General I. S. Konev's 2nd Ukrainian Front wheeled westward from its previous objective, Krivoi Rog, and its tank army (the 5th Guards) seized Kirovograd from Army Group South's Eighth Army. The twin Red Army offensives pinned two of Eighth Army's corps into a large salient along the Dnepr River north of Korsun'-Shevchenkovskii.

After these initial offensive successes, from 24 January through 17 February the 1st and 2nd Ukrainian Fronts struck the flanks of Eighth Army's defenses at the base of the Korsun'-Shevchenkovskii salient, and two exploiting tank armies (the new 6th and 5th Guards) encircled the defending German corps. In several weeks of heavy fighting, Red Army troops destroyed up to 30,000 *Wehrmacht* troops while fending off fierce German counterstrokes before Army Group South's was able to once again stabilize its defenses.

While German attention was riveted on the fierce fighting at Korsun'-Shevchenkovskii, the *Stavka* ordered Red Army forces to strike both flanks of Army Group South to capitalize of the fact that the bulk of the army group's panzer reserves were decisively engaged in the Korsun'-Shevchenkovskii region. On the 1st Ukrainian Front's right flank, from 27 January through 11 February, the 13th and 60th Armies and the 1st Guards and 6th Guards Cavalry Corps attacked Manstein's overextended left flank south of the Pripiat' Marshes, unhinged German defenses, and seized Rovno and Lutsk, creating favorable positions from which to conduct future operations into Army Group South's rear. Further south, from 30 January to 29 February the General R. Ia. Malinovsky's 3rd and General F. I. Tolbukhin's 4th Ukrainian Fronts launched concentric blows against the defenses of Army Group South's Sixth Army anchored in the "great bend" of the Dnepr River, collapsed German defenses in the Nikopol' bridgehead on the Dnepr's south bank, seized the salient in the river's "great bend", and captured Krivoi Rog.

By the end of February, Red Army forces had cleared German defenders from the entire Dnepr River line. Deprived of their river defenses, Manstein's forces were now vulnerable to complete defeat in detail in the vast interior plains of Ukraine. During this period, General L. A. Govorov's Leningrad Front and General K. A. Meretskov's Volkhov Fronts, soon joined by General M. M. Popov's 2nd Baltic Front, conducted the massive Leningrad-Novgorod offensive in the Leningrad region, a painfully slow advance that began on 14 January and endured through February and drove Army Group North's Eighteenth and Sixteenth Armies back to their Panther Line defenses. At the same time, the 1st Baltic, Western, and Belorussian Fronts conducted limited diversionary operations against Army Group Center's forces in eastern Belorussia.

The Red Army's offensive operations along the main strategic axis in the Ukraine continued virtually without a halt in early March despite miserable terrain conditions created by the spring thaw. During the second phase of this offensive, from began on 4 March and lasted through late April, five additional Red Army offensives, which involved all six of the Red Army's tank armies, completed clearing *Wehrmacht* forces from the Ukraine and the Crimea. The *Stavka's* strategic objective was to separate Army Groups Center and South from one another and destroy the latter by pinning it against the Black Sea or Carpathian Mountains.

On 4 March the 1st Ukrainian Front, now personally commanded by Zhukov after Vatutin's death at the hands of Ukrainian partisans, attacked southwestward from the Shepetovka and Dubno regions towards Chernovtsy near the Rumanian border. Two of the Zhukov's tank armies (the 3rd Guards and 4th) tore a gapping hole in the defenses of Army Group South's Fourth Panzer Army and by 7 March approached Proskurov, where Manstein's panzer reserves (the III and XXXXVIII Panzer Corps) halted their advance. Soon after, however, the 1st Tank Army joined the offensive, and on 21 March the 1st and 4th Tank Armies once again burst into Manstein's operational rear. By 27 March the two tank armies reached and crossed the Dnestr River, encircling the bulk of German First Panzer Army in the Kamenets-Podolsk region. By 17 April the 1st Tank Army had reached the Carpathian Mountains, effectively cutting off Manstein's army group, which had been re-named Army Group North Ukraine, contact with Army Group South Ukraine, which was operating to the south in northern Rumania. However, Manstein was successfully withdrew the encircled First Panzer Army to safety in southern Poland in several weeks of intense and complex fighting.

One day after Zhukov's 1st Ukrainian Front began its offensive on Proskurov, on 5 March Konev's 2nd Ukrainian Front attacked toward Uman' spearheaded by three more tank armies (the 2nd, 5th Guards, and 6th). The *front's* exploiting tank forces captured Uman' and Vinnitsa on 10 March, and on 17 March, the 5th Guards Tank Army reached and crossed the Dnestr River, effectively separating Army Group North Ukraine's First Panzer Army from Army Group South Ukraine's Eighth Army to the south. While the six tank armies were setting the offensive pace for the 1st and 2nd Ukrainian Fronts, on 6 March Malinovsky's 3rd Ukrainian Front launched its own offensive (the Bereznegovatoe-Snigirevka operation) along the Black Sea coast against Army Group "A", an army group that Hitler had formed in late 1943 to defend the southern Ukraine. By 18 March it had encircled but failed to destroy Army Group "A's" Sixth Army and created conditions conducive to a subsequent advance on Odessa. Simultaneously, Tolbukhin's 4th Ukrainian Front assaulted German Seventeenth Army's defenses in the Crimea on 8 April, bottled German forces up in Sevastopol' by 16 April, and forced the Germans to evacuate the city by 10 May.

As far as Red Army operations in Belorussia were concerned, Russian official histories recognize only two offensive operations in the region. First, between 3 February and 13 March General I. Kh. Bagramian's 1st Baltic Front and General V. D. Sokolovksy's Western Front pounded the defenses of Army Group Center's Third Panzer and Fourth Armies around Vitebsk but to no avail. Second, from 21-26 February, General K. K. Rokossovsky's Belorussian Front struck the defenses of Army Group Center's Ninth Army at Rogachev and Zhlobin, driving the Germans back but capturing only the former. However, Russian historians label the two offensives as diversionary in nature

Traditionally, major military operations constituting the winter campaign of 1943-44 include:

- **The Soviet Leningrad-Novgorod Offensive (14 January-1 March 1944)**
- **The Soviet Zhitomir-Berdichev Offensive (24 December 1943-14 January 1944)**
- **The Soviet Kirovograd Offensive (5-16 January 1944)**
- **The Soviet Korsun'-Shevchenkovskii Offensive (Cherkassy) (24 January-17 February 1944)**
- **The Soviet Rovno-Lutsk Offensive (27 January-11 February 1944)**
- **The Soviet Vitebsk Offensive (3 February-13 March 1944)**
- **The Soviet Rogachev-Zhlobin Offensive (21-26 February 1944)**
- **The Soviet Proskurov-Chernovtsy Offensive (Kamenets-Podolsk) (4 March-17 April 1944)**
- **The Soviet Uman'-Botoshany Offensive (5 March-17 April 1944)**
- **The Soviet Chernogovatoe-Snegirevka Offensive (6-18 March 1944)**
- **The Soviet Odessa Offensive (26 March-14 April 1944)**
- **The Soviet Crimean Offensive (8 April-12 May 1944)**

The Forgotten War:

Conventional accounts of Red Army offensive operations during the winter campaign of 1943-44 focus almost exclusively on the successful offensives in the Leningrad region and in the Ukraine and the Crimea. They overlook two major categories of major Red Army offensives, specifically, those that took place at the end of the Red Army's strategic advance in the Leningrad region and the Ukraine and the vital Red Army offensive into Belorussia, which was a continuation of operations that had begun in October 1943.

While it is relatively easy to overlook these follow-on and continuation offensives because most of them failed, the *Stavka's* rationale for conducting these offensives in the first place is quite clear. Unfortunately, by their very nature they have been easy to conceal. Based on its previous wartime experiences, by 1944 it was fairly routine practice for the *Stavka* to expand its strategic horizons while the Red Army was conducting major offensive operations and to assign its operating *fronts* new and more ambitious missions. In general, the *Stavka* justified this practice on the grounds that one could not determine whether or when German collapse would occur, and, unless one pressed the offensive relentlessly, opportunities would be lost. Of course, when the *Stavka* ordered its overextended forces to perform these new missions, it always faced the risk that its attacking forces could fall victim to the sort of counterstrokes that Manstein had sprung on Red Army forces in the Donbas in early 1943. This, in fact, occurred on a smaller scale in the spring of 1944.

In fairness to Russian historians, the dramatic successes that the Red Army's strategic offensives achieved in 1944 and 1945 make it far more difficult to assess accurately whether additional military operations at the end of any major offensive thrust

were simply attempts to exploit success or were simply designed to posture forces more advantageously for subsequent offensive action or to deceive the enemy regarding future offensive intentions.

The forgotten battles during the winter campaign of 1943-44 include:

- **The Soviet Narva Offensives (15-28 February, 1-4, 18-24 March 1944)**
- **The Soviet Pskov, Ostrov Offensive, The Struggle for the Panther Line (9 March-15 April 1944)**
- **The Soviet Belorussian Offensive (Vitebsk, Bogushevsk, Rogachev, Shlobin) (1 January-15 March 1944)**
- **The Soviet Iassy-Kishinev Offensive (Targul-Frumos) (2-7 May 1944)**

Two forgotten offensive operations that the Red Army conducted during the winter campaign of 1943-44 fall into the category of follow-on or continuation offensives. The first took place in the north at the very end of the Leningrad-Novgorod offensive, when the Leningrad and 2nd Baltic Fronts attempted to breach the vaunted German Panther Defense Line in the Narva, Pskov, Ostrov, and Pustoshka sectors. The second occurred in the south along the Rumanian border at the end of the Red Army's advance through the Ukraine when the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Front's attempted to capture Iassy and Kishinev in northern Rumania.

The first of these forgotten offensives took place during the waning stages of the Red Army's offensive to clear Army Group North's forces from the southern portion of Leningrad region. After the Leningrad-Novgorod offensive officially ended on 1 March, Govorov's and Popov's *fronts* pounded the *Wehrmacht's* Panther Line defenses in the sector from Narva on the Gulf of Finland to Pustoshka in the south for a period of almost six weeks. During this period, the Leningrad Front's 2nd Shock, 59th, and 8th Armies repeatedly attempted to encircle and destroy Army Group North's forces defending Narva and thrust deep into Estonia, but in vain. To the south, the *front's* 42nd, 67th, and 54th Armies assaulted the defenses of Army Group North's Eighteenth Army from Pskov to Ostrov, drove a wedge into the defenses, but were unable to seize either city. Meanwhile, to the south, on the Leningrad Front's left flank, the 2nd Baltic Front's 1st and 3rd Shock, 10th Guards, and 22nd Armies achieved only limited success while they repeatedly battered the defenses of Army Group North's Sixteenth Army at and north of Pustoshka. This heavy and bloody fighting was an indication of how difficult it would be for the Red Army to smash its way through the Panther Line and invade the Baltic region later in 1944.

The second follow-on offensive occurred in early May 1944, when Malinovsky's 2nd Ukrainian Front and Tolbukhin's 3rd Ukrainian Front attempted to breech Army Group South Ukraine's defenses in northern Rumania and capture Iassy and Kishinev. Although the Tolbukhin's offensive had to be cancelled due to heavy German resistance along the Dnestr River, the Malinovsky's *front* attacked on 2 May as ordered with elements of three tank armies (the 2nd, 5th, and 6th) and a force of between 500 and 600 tanks. During the over three days of heavy fighting (called by the Germans the Battle of

Targul-Frumos), the Germans mounted a counterattack with the LVII Panzer Corps' "Grossdeutschland" and 24th Panzer Divisions, which repelled the attacking Red Army forces with heavy losses (reportedly 350 tanks).

Throughout the entire winter campaign, the Red Army's 1st Baltic, Western, and Belorussian Fronts continued their efforts to smash Army Group Center's defenses in Belorussia. Pursuant to *Stavka* orders, the three *fronts* conducted repeated assaults on *Wehrmacht* defenses across the entire front in an attempt to collapse and defeat Army Group Center. Bagramian's 1st Baltic Front struck north and northeast of Vitebsk in near constant offensive operation from late December 1943 through January 1944, severed the communications between German forces in Vitebsk and Polotsk, and advanced into the western suburbs of Vitebsk. At the same time, Sokolovsky's Western Front pounded German defenses southeast and south of Vitebsk and tried to encircle the city from the south. At the same time, Rokossovsky's Belorussian Front captured Kalinkovichi in January and assaulted the defenses of Army Group Center's Ninth Army at Rogachev in an attempt to sever the communications between Army Groups Center and South.

Between 29 December 1943 and 29 March 1944, the 1st Baltic, Western and Belorussian Fronts launched at least seven distinct offensives that cost the attackers over 200,000 casualties. Try as they did, however, they were unable to make further significant advances into Belorussia. During the waning stages of the offensive and angry *Stavka* relieved Sokolovsky from command of the Western Front. At least in part, the entire Belorussian offensive has languished in obscurity to protect the reputation of Sokolovsky, who, during the period from 1952-1960, survived the wartime embarrassment and rose to become the Chief of the Soviet Army General Staff and one of the Soviet Union's leading strategic theorists.

Reflections:

During the course of four months of nearly continuous combat, the Red Army liberated Leningrad, the Ukraine, and the Crimea, and made slight inroads into Belorussia. In the process, the Red Army eliminated 16 German divisions and at least 50,000 troops from the *Wehrmacht's* order of battle by means of encirclements and sheer attrition and reduced another 60 German divisions to skeletal strength. Whereas the late winter and spring of 1942 and 1943 had been periods of rest and refitting for the Germans, the corresponding period of 1944 was one unremitting struggle for survival. By the time the winter campaign ended, Army Group Center, the one area of relative stability during this period, had become a huge salient jutting to the east, denuded of most of its reserves.

By May 1944 the Red Army had liberated virtually all Soviet territory in the south and, in the process, shattered large portions of the First Panzer, Sixth, Eighth, and Seventeenth Armies. In the north, Red Army forces had liberated most of southern Leningrad region, and it's the unceasing assaults on Army Group Center in Belorussia had seriously weakened that force, which had already lost reserves to shore up sagging German defenses to the north and south. After the collapse of Germany's defenses on the northern and southern flanks, the strategic attention of Hitler and the German High Command was now riveted on the southern region. The presence of all six Red Army

tank armies in that region led them to conclude that it would be the focus of the Red Army's summer offensive. This preoccupation explains the German's surprise when the *Stavka's* next great offensive was aimed at Army Group Center.

The Red Army's victories during the winter and spring of 1944 had political and well as military implications. In short, Rumanian support of the German war effort weakened in light of Rumania's already catastrophic military losses and the loss of its northern regions (Bessarabia and Moldavia) in April and May 1944. Then, on 19 March German troops occupied Hungary to prevent its possible defection to the Allied camp.

In late spring 1944, while the Germans focused their political and strategic attention focused on the Balkans, Stalin and the *Stavka* prepared to deal, once and for all, with Army Group Center.

Historical Debates:

- Stalin's "Broad Front" Strategy

Most historians assert that Soviet military strategy in the winter of 1943 and 1944 involved the conduct of major offensives along two main axes, namely, in the Leningrad region and the Ukraine. Further they argue that this strategy was designed to concentrate requisite strength along these axes so that the Red Army's operating *fronts* could achieve the missions the *Stavka* assigned to them, and the *Stavka* could economize on the expenditure of vital Soviet manpower and material resources. All agree that the main Red Army offensive effort occurred in the Ukraine. This assertion is only partially correct.

In reality, Stalin, with the agreement of his chief military advisers, ordered the Red Army to conduct major offensives along the entire Soviet-German front in a continuation of the "broad front" strategy he had pursued since the beginning of the war and in consonance with his long-standing rationale that, if the Red Army applied pressure everywhere, German defenses were likely to break somewhere. Thus, the winter campaign included major assaults against the German Panther Line in the Baltic region and across the entire expanse of eastern Belorussia.

However, it is also noteworthy that Stalin and the *Stavka* devoted special attention to organizing and pressing offensive operations aimed at liberating the Baltic region, and, once the Red Army's initial offensives proved successful, to its offensives in the Ukraine, particularly after the offensive into Belorussia bogged down. Most important, when Red Army forces reached the Dnestr River in mid-April, Stalin ordered an additional offensive to project Soviet forces deeper into Rumania. This marked the beginning of Stalin's long-standing strategy to project Red Army forces into the Balkans to secure a more favorable postwar settlement and division of the spoils of war with his western Allies.

Hitler's Stand Fast Policy

Historians have correctly asserted that Hitler's "stand fast" strategy matured during the winter of 1943-44 to such a degree that it seriously inhibited future *Wehrmacht* military operations. Indeed, during this campaign Hitler's strategic conduct of the war

began its evolution from a "stand fast" strategy to an outright "*festung*" [fortress] strategy but with only mixed success. While Hitler's "stand fast" orders failed to thwart the Red Army's Leningrad-Novgorod offensive, his "*festung*" strategy did halt the Red Army juggernaut in the north along the fortified defenses of the Panther Line. In Belorussia, Hitler's conversion of Vitebsk and other cities into fortresses forestalled defeat in the winter of 1944 but fostered even more disastrous defeats in the summer of 1944 all along the periphery of the Belorussian "balcony." In southern Russia, Hitler's strategy cost the *Wehrmacht* the better part of two army corps in the Korsun' (Cherkassy) pocket, almost an entire panzer army at Kamenets-Podolsk, and significant forces at Sevastopol' in the Crimea. Later, however, Hitler's "stand fast" orders defeated a major Red Army thrust into northern Rumania.

THE SUMMER-FALL CAMPAIGN, JUNE-DECEMBER 1944

Context:

A COMPARATIVE CHRONOLOGY OF OPERATIONS ON THE EASTERN AND WESTERN FRONTS DURING THE SUMMER CAMPAIGN OF 1944

- **From June through August 1944, the Allies landed 1 million men on the Normandy coast of France and 86,000 men and 6 divisions on France's southern coast and advanced to capture Paris. The advance cost the *Wehrmacht* 530,000 men.**
- **From June through August 1944, 8 Red Army *fronts* with 52 armies, 5.5 million men, and about 300 divisions defeated and destroyed 3 German army groups totaling about 1.5 million men and over 100 divisions, inflicting over 800,000 casualties on the Germans, and reached East Prussia, the Vistula River south of Warsaw, Hungary, and Bulgaria.**

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- **By September 1944, U.S. Army strength in Europe reached 2 million men and 34 divisions. One million men were deployed in the Pacific Theater and 3.5 million in the U.S.**

*****

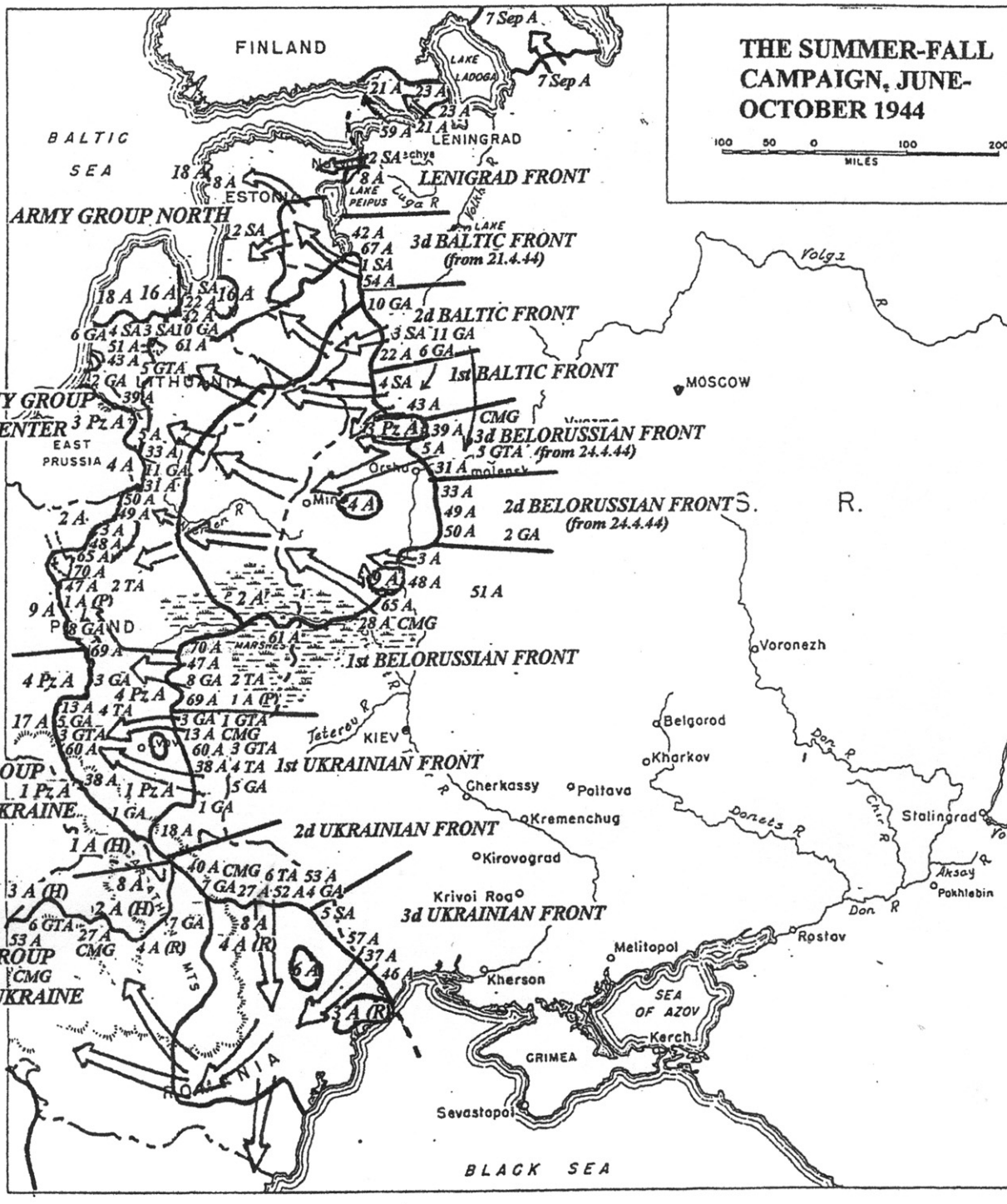
- **From October through December 1944, About 2 million Allied forces reached the German border and liberated Belgium and southern Holland, but were struck by a massive German counteroffensive in the Bulge. The U.S. suffered 75,000 casualties and the Germans 100,000.**
- **From October through December 1944, 7 Red Army Fronts with 30 armies, 3 million men, and over 200 divisions conquered the Baltic region, besieged Budapest, and captured Belgrade.**

The Conventional View:

Largely for logistical and operational reasons, the *Stavka* planned to conduct five major strategic offensive operations in staggered sequence during the summer of 1944, beginning in the north and working successively to the south. After commencing with an operation against Finnish forces on the Karelian Isthmus in early June, subsequently, the offensives would expand to encompass Belorussia in late June, central and southern Poland in mid-July, and Rumania in late August. The *Stavka's* intent in launching these offensives was to encircle and destroy Army Group Center, smash Army Groups North and South Ukraine, and capture Riga, Minsk, L'vov, and Bucharest by the end of August 1944.

Govorov's Leningrad Front conducted the first of these strategic offensives (See Map 7). After prolonged but fruitless political negotiations with the Finnish government regarding its withdrawal from the war, the Leningrad Front's 21st and 23rd Armies struck

Map 7. The Summer-Fall Campaign of 1944.



by surprise on 10 June 1944, penetrated three Finnish defense lines, and captured Vyborg on 20 June. Within months, Finland signed a separate peace with the Soviet Union.

Only days after the fall of Vyborg, the Red Army began its massive offensive against Army Group Center in Belorussia. Striking on 22 and 23 June, three Red Army *fronts* began two tactical encirclement operations to eliminate the German anchor positions on the northern and southern flanks of the Belorussian "balcony." While three armies of the Bagramian's 1st Baltic Front and General Cherniakhovsky's 3rd Belorussian Front encircled two corps of Army Group Center's Third Panzer Army in Vitebsk, four armies on the right wing of Rokossovsky's 1st Belorussian Front encircle two corps of the army group's Ninth Army in Bobruisk. The 5th Guards Tank Army and a cavalry-mechanized group, cooperating with 3rd Belorussian Front in the north and a collection of mobile corps and cavalry-mechanized group from the 1st Belorussian Front in the south, then conducted a deep envelopment off all of Army Group Center's Fourth Army east of Minsk. By early August, the four attacking Red Army *fronts* had virtually destroyed Army Group Center and occupied much of Belorussia.

After achieving striking success in the initial stage of the Belorussian operation, the *Stavka* expanded the offensive to the northern and southern flanks. In the north, the 1st Baltic Front attacked westward along the banks of the Western Dvina River through Polotsk in the direction of East Prussia to protect the northern flank of the Red Army's main attack force in Belorussia and to create favorable conditions for a subsequent exploitation toward Riga.

Then, on 18 July five armies (including one Polish army) deployed on the 1st Belorussian Front's left wing south of the Pripiat' Marshes, struck and shattered the defenses of Army Group South Ukraine's Fourth Panzer Army west of Kovel. Within hours, the *front's* 2nd Tank Army and several mobile corps began exploiting success to the west with the infantry in their wake. On 24 July Rokossovsky's forces captured Lublin and pushed on westward towards the Vistula River south of Warsaw. By 2 August, the 1st Belorussian Front's left wing armies seized bridgeheads over the Vistula River at Magnuszew and Pulavy and commenced an almost two-month struggle with counterattacking *Wehrmacht* forces to retain these vital bridgeheads as launching pads for future, even larger-scale offensives into heart of central Poland toward Berlin.

During the advance by the 1st Belorussian Front's left wing to the Vistula River, the Polish Home Army staged an insurrection in Warsaw. Only days before, the *Stavka* had ordered Rokossovsky to dispatch his 2nd Tank Army in a dash toward Warsaw's eastern suburbs, protected on the right by a cavalry corps (the 2nd Guards) and the 47th Army. The tank army reached the region east of Warsaw on 29 July, but before the 47th Army could reach the region, from 30 July through 5 August, two panzer corps (XXXIX and IV SS) delivered a counterstroke against the tank army and forced it to withdraw with heavy losses. At the time, the bulk of the 1st Belorussian Front's center and right wing were struggling to overcome German defenses north of Siedlce on the approaches to the Narew River and, according to Soviet accounts, were unable to support the dash to Warsaw. Western accounts claim that Stalin deliberately withheld support for the Polish Home Army until it was totally destroyed.

Compounding the Germans' difficulties, Konev's 1st Ukrainian Front began its offensive toward L'vov on 13 July with the mission of encircling and destroying German Army Group North Ukraine's Fourth Panzer Army and its panzer reserves east of L'vov and capturing the vital Polish city. After penetrating German defenses east and northeast of L'vov, Konev committed his 1st, 3rd Guards, and 4th Tank Armies to combat, encircled and destroyed a Fourth Panzer Army's XIII Army Corps in the Brody region, partially encircled *Wehrmacht* forces at L'vov, and launched his 3rd Guards and 4th Tank Armies on a deep exploitation northwestward towards the Vistula River in the vicinity of Sandomierz in southern Poland. In early August, Konev's exploiting forces seized a bridgehead over the Vistula River at and south of Sandomierz and commenced a two-month struggle against German reserves for possession of the vital gateway for future operations across southern Poland. The twin offensives across central and southern Poland projected Red Army forces forward to the Vistula River and severely damaged Army Group North Ukraine.

The climax of the Red Army's summer offensive occurred on 20 August 1944 when Malinovsky's 2nd and Tolbukhin's 3rd Ukrainian Fronts commenced operations to destroy *Wehrmacht* and Rumanian forces assigned to Army Group South Ukraine in Rumania. Attacking north of Iassy and east of Kishinev, the two *fronts* smashed German defenses, forced the surrender of the Rumanian Third and Fourth Armies, and committed the 6th Tank Army and multiple mobile corps to an exploitation operation deep into Rumania. The attacking force occupied Bucharest on 31 August and then swept westward across the Carpathian Mountains into Hungary and southward into Bulgaria. In the process, the Red Army's forces encircled and destroyed the German Sixth Army (for the second time) and forced Army Group South Ukraine's shattered Eighth Army to withdraw westward into Hungary.

The Red Army completed this vast mosaic of successful strategic operations in the fall. As it did so, its forces in the far north defeated German forces west of Murmansk and liberated the Petsamo region. At the same time, while the Leningrad and 2nd and 3rd Baltic Fronts overcame Army Group North's strong Panther Line defenses and liberated the bulk of the Baltic region in September and October, from October through December the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Ukrainian Fronts advanced into Hungary, besieged Budapest, and occupied Belgrade in cooperation with Tito's partisan forces.

Thus, the conventional view of military operations during the summer-fall campaign of 1944 includes the following major operations.

- **The Soviet Karelian Offensive (10-20 June 1944)**
- **The Soviet Belorussian Offensive (Operation Bagration) (23 June-29 August 1944)**
- **The Soviet Lublin-Brest Offensive (18 July-2 August 1944)**
- **The Soviet L'vov-Sandomierz Offensive (13 July-29 August 1944)**
- **The Soviet Iassy-Kishinev Offensive (20 August-25 September 1944)**
- **The Soviet Baltic Offensive (14 September-20 October 1944)**
- **The Soviet Memel' Offensive (5-22 October 1944)**

- **The Soviet Petsamo-Kirkeness Offensive (7-29 October 1944)**
- **The Soviet Debrecen Offensive (6-28 October 1944)**
- **The Soviet Belgrade Offensive (28 September-20 October 1944)**
- **The Soviet Budapest Offensive (29 October 1944-13 February 1945)**

The Forgotten War:

Given the spectacular success the Red Army achieved in the summer and fall of 1944 the number of forgotten battles sharply diminished. In fact, in most of its offensive sectors, the Red Army achieved far more than Stalin and the *Stavka* anticipated. Nevertheless, there were occasions when Stalin could not resist an attempt to achieve even more. Consequently, two unsuccessful Red Army attempts to "expand the envelop of success" were imbedded in this panorama of successful Red Army offensives

Major forgotten battles during this period at least include:

- **The Soviet East Prussian Offensive (the Goldap-Gumbinnen operation)(16-30 October 1944)**
- **The Soviet East Carpathian Offensive (8 September-28 October 1944)**

During its successful Memel' offensive, which lasted from 5-22 October 1944, the 1st Baltic and 3rd Belorussian Front's forces reached the shores of the Baltic Sea, separating Army Group North's forces isolated in Courland from Army Group Center's forces in East Prussia. Immediately after completing the Memel' operation, the *Stavka* ordered Cherniakhovsky's 3rd Belorussian Front to penetrate into Germany's East Prussian heartland by attacking westward along the Gumbinnen-Konigsburg axis.

Cherniakhovsky began his offensive on 16 October with the 5th and 11th Guards Armies and, after a modest advance, committed the 31st and 39th Armies to combat. However, the *Wehrmacht's* resistance was so fierce and its fortifications so formidable that it took four days for the initial Red Army force to penetrate its tactical defenses. Then, on 20 October, Cherniakhovsky committed the fresh 28th Army and the 2nd Guards Tank Corps to overcome the strong German second defense line. Even though the *front's* forces finally ruptured the second defense line and approached the outskirts of Gumbinnen, the offensive faltered with heavy losses in the face of the strong and deep German defenses and counterattacks by hastily regrouped German panzer reserves. By the time the fighting ended on 27 October, Cherniakhovsky's forces had advanced up to 40 miles into East Prussia only to learn from experience that more extensive preparations would be required in the future if the Red Army was to conquer Germany's East Prussian bastion.

The second forgotten offensive, fragmentary accounts of which are recorded in existing histories, took place in the Carpathian Mountain region between southern Poland and eastern Hungary. The *Stavka's* intent in launching this offensive was to overcome the strong defenses of Army Group Center's First Panzer Army, which was stubbornly defending the central portion of the Carpathian Mountains in Slovakia, by doing so hindering communications between the Red Army's *fronts* operating in Poland and

Hungary. The *Stavka's* plan for the East Carpathian offensive required called the forces on the left wing of Konev's 1st Ukrainian Front and General I. E. Petrov's 4th Ukrainian Front to attack southward into Slovakia and Ruthenia to link up forces of Malinovsky's 2nd Ukrainian Front, which were attacking northward through eastern Hungary. At the same time, the 1st Ukrainian Front was to capitalize on and support a popular insurrection against German authorities in Slovakia.

Once it began, the offensive by all three *fronts* fell far short of achieving its ambitious aims. The offensive by the 1st Ukrainian Front's 38th Army and supporting mobile corps faltered in late October in the Dukla Pass because of the difficult terrain and strong German counterstrokes, while 4th Ukrainian Front's offensive achieved only limited progress in the mountains farther east. To the south, the 2nd Ukrainian Front's 6th Tank Army captured Debrecen, but, thereafter, strong German and Hungarian counterstrokes savaged the *front's* exploiting cavalry-mechanized groups near Nyregyhaza in northern Hungary, far short of their ultimate objectives.

Reflections:

Overall, the Red Army's summer and fall campaign of 1944 constituted a long series of unmitigated disasters for Axis armies and fortunes in the East. The Red Army's summer offensives alone cost Axis forces an estimated 465,000 soldiers killed or captured. Between 1 June and 30 November 1944, total German losses on all fronts were 1,457,000, of which 903,000 were lost on the Eastern Front. By the end of 1944, only Hungary remained as a German ally, and Germany felt increasingly besieged and isolated, with the Red Army lodged in East Prussia in the north, along the Vistula River in Poland, and across the Danube in Hungary, and with Allied armies within striking distance of Germany's western borders.

The Soviet Union also suffered heavily during this period, coming ever closer to the bottom of its once-limitless barrel of manpower. In an effort to compensate for this, Soviet plans used steadily increasing amounts of artillery, armor, and airpower to reduce manpower losses. In the process, moreover, the Soviet commanders had the opportunity to test out their operational theories under a variety of different tactical and terrain considerations. These commanders still made occasional mistakes, but they entered 1945 at the top of their form.

By the end of 1944, the Red Army was strategically positioned to conquer the remainder of Poland, Hungary, and Austria in a single campaign. The only question that remained was whether this last strategic thrust would propel Red Army forces to Berlin as well, and, if so, where would the Allied armies complete their operations? Shadow Soviet-style governments had accompanied the Red Army into eastern Europe, and the Yalta Conference, to be held in February 1945, would tacitly legitimize these regimes. Where the contending armies advanced in 1945 would have a decisive influence over the political complexion of postwar Europe. This stark fact underscored the importance of subsequent operations during the race for Berlin and, coincidentally, generated more than a little suspicion in the respective Allied camps.

Historical Debates:

- Stalin's Strategic Intent:

Historians assert that the Red Army conducted five major strategic offensives during the summer-fall campaign of 1944 in consecutive fashion, which collapsed the Wehrmacht's defenses across the entire Soviet-German front and established requisite conditions for a final offensive to destroy Hitler's Third Reich. Throughout this campaign, they argue, Stalin's strategic gaze remained fixed intently on the Warsaw-Berlin axis. At the same time, many historians have also recognized Stalin's intent to gain a strategic foothold in the Balkans by conducting the massive August 1944 invasion of Rumania. This interpretation is essentially correct, but with some important qualifications.

First, although the Red Army's Karelian, Belorussian, Lublin-Brest, L'vov-Sandomierz, and Iassy-Kishinev offensives were indeed consecutive, they were also simultaneous in that they overlapped in terms of their timing and conduct. In essence, they replicated the winter campaign in the Ukraine on an even larger scale and, by doing so, represented a continuation of Stalin's strategy of conducting strategic offensives across a "broad front." Likewise, during the summer-fall campaign, Stalin and his chief military advisers also continued to "press the envelop of the possible" by conducting fresh offensives long after the strength and momentum of the initial offensive impulses had expired. This occurred in East Prussia and Hungary in October 1944.

More important still from a geopolitical standpoint, in conjunction with its powerful twin drives to Budapest and Belgrade, the Red Army's failed East Carpathian offensive of October 1944 also evidenced Stalin's firm resolve to liberate Slovakia and hasten the consolidation of the Soviet political control or at least influence over the critical Danube River basin region.

- Hitler's Stand Fast Policy:

Most historians have correctly assessed that Hitler's "stand fast" policy reaped disaster after disaster for the *Wehrmacht* throughout all of 1944. Beginning in July 1944 when the bulk of three German armies (Third Panzer, Fourth, and Ninth) perished defending "fortresses" in Belorussia, Hitler's strategy continued producing major disasters throughout the remainder of the year. The *Wehrmacht* lost another army corps at Brody in July, two Rumanian armies and the bulk of two German armies in Rumania during August, and the remnants of Army Group North and several more corps isolated or encircled in Courland in October and Budapest in December. It remains to be seen, however, whether the *Wehrmacht's* losses in these instances actually accelerated what was becoming an inevitable defeat.

- The Warsaw Uprising:

No case of Red Army action or inaction on the Soviet-German front has generated more heated controversy then its operations east of Warsaw in August and September 1944 during the Polish Home Army's Warsaw uprising against German occupation forces. While most Western historians have routinely accused Stalin of perfidy and

deliberate treachery in permitting the Germans to destroy the Warsaw Poles, Russian historians counter by asserting the Red Army made every reasonable attempt to assist the beleaguered Poles.

In fact, in late July 1944 the *Stavka* ordered its 2nd Tank Army to race northward to Warsaw with the 47th Army and a cavalry corps in its wake. After encountering two *Wehrmacht* divisions defending the southern approaches to Warsaw, the tank army tried to bypass the German defenses from the northeast but ran into a counterstroke by four *Wehrmacht* panzer divisions, which severely mauled the tank army and forced it to withdraw on 5 August. During the ensuing weeks, while the Warsaw uprising began, matured, but ultimately failed, the forces on the 1st Belorussian Front's right wing continued their advance against Army Group Center northeast of Warsaw. For whatever motive, however, the forces on the 1st Belorussian Front's right wing focused on defending the Magnuszew bridgehead south of Warsaw, which was being subjected to heavy German counterattacks throughout mid-August, and the forces on the *front's* left wing continued their advance to the Bug River north of Warsaw and attempted to seize crossings over the river necessary to facilitate future offensive operations.

Throughout the entire period up to 20 August 1944, the 1st Belorussian Front's 47th Army remained the only major Red Army forces deployed across the Vistula River opposite Warsaw. On that date the 1st Polish Army joined it. Red Army forces north of Warsaw finally advanced across the Bug River on 3 September, closed up to the Narew River the following day, and fought their way into bridgeheads across the Narew on 6 September. Lead elements of two Polish divisions finally assaulted across the Vistula River into Warsaw on 13 September but made little progress and were evacuated back across the river ten days later.

Political considerations and motivations aside, an objective consideration of combat in the Warsaw region indicates that, prior to early September, German resistance was sufficient to halt any Soviet assistance to the Poles in Warsaw, were it intended. Thereafter, it would have required a major reorientation of military efforts from Magnuszew in the south or, more realistically, from the Bug and Narew River axis in the north in order to muster sufficient force to break into Warsaw. And once broken into, Warsaw would have been a costly city to clear of Germans and an unsuitable location from which to launch a new offensive.

THE WINTER CAMPAIGN, JANUARY-MARCH 1945

Context:

A COMPARATIVE CHRONOLOGY OF OPERATIONS ON THE EASTERN AND WESTERN FRONTS DURING THE WINTER CAMPAIGN OF 1945

- **In January 1945 Allied forces recaptured the Bulge and prepared to penetrate Germany's Western Wall.**
- **In January 1945, 5 Red Army *fronts* with 35 armies, 250 divisions, and almost 4 million men smashed 2 German army groups defending East Prussia and Poland and advanced to Konigsberg and the Oder River, inflicting 500,000 losses on German forces.**

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- **On 1 February 1945 Allied forces reached the German West Wall and, in the south, the Rhine River, inflicting 250,000 losses on German forces, and were 320 miles from Berlin.**
- **On 1 February 1945, Red Army troops occupied bridgeheads across the Oder, 36 miles from Berlin.**

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- **From 1 February through 4 April 1945, Allied troops occupied the Rhineland, killing, capturing, or wounding 325,000 Germans, crossed the Rhine and reached the Weser River, 170 miles from Berlin. Allied strength reached about 4 million men, including 3 million U.S.**
- **From 1 February through 4 April 1945, the Red Army conquered Konigsberg, Pomerania, and Silesia, repelled the last *Wehrmacht* offensive of the war at Lake Balaton in Hungary, and advanced to Vienna.**

The Conventional View:

After reviewing all of its strategic options, the *Stavka* began planning the Red Army's winter campaign in late October 1944. The victories of the summer and fall had created a much more favorable situation for Red Army offensive action; the overall length of the main front shortened from over 1,000 miles to 780 miles, significant German forces uselessly isolated in Courland and Budapest, and the Soviet Union clearly held the strategic initiative. Soviet intelligence estimates indicated that, during 1944, 96 German divisions had been captured or destroyed, and another 33 so weakened that they were disbanded. Still, even the seemingly inexhaustible strength of the Soviet Union had its limits, and the planners sought a means for rapid and relatively bloodless victory. The shortened front meant that the Red Army could conduct fewer but far more powerful offensives to accomplish its objectives of seizing Berlin and destroying Nazi Germany. This was necessary since German defenses thickened as Red Army forces advanced west.

In addition, Stalin restructured his command and control methods to insure greater efficiency. In late October he decided to control the Red Army's operating *fronts* directly from Moscow, dispensing with the *Stavka* representatives and coordinators who had represented it in the field during the previous three years. Instead, he restructured his forces for the new offensives into a smaller number of extremely powerful *fronts* and reshuffled his *front* commanders. The 1st Belorussian Front, now personally commanded by Zhukov, was to advance directly on Berlin with Konev's 1st Ukrainian Front advancing on a parallel course just to its south. The 2nd Belorussian Front, now under Rokossovsky's command, was to advance westward north of the Vistula River toward Danzig and Pomerania to protect the 1st Belorussian Front's right flank

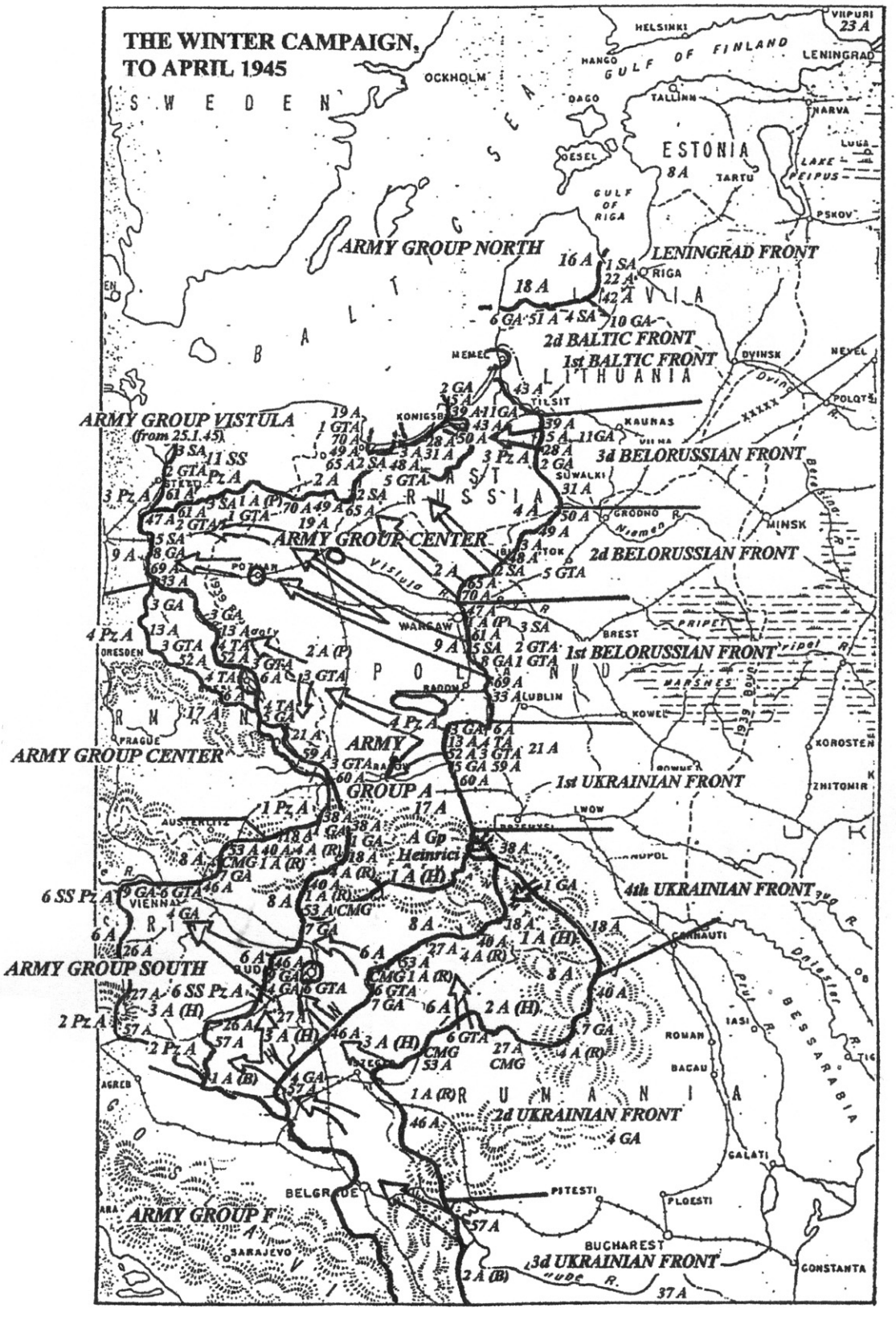
Based upon the plan formulated by the *Stavka*, the Red Army conducted a two-stage operation to destroy Hitler's Third Reich (See Map 8). First, as described above, Malinovsky's 2nd and Tolbukhin's 3rd Ukrainian Fronts continued their advance in Hungary during November and December to draw German reserves away from the Warsaw-Berlin axis. Then the main offensive, which was tentatively scheduled to begin between 15 and 20 January 1945 but began on 13 January to relieve German pressure on the Allies in the Battle of the Bulge, shattered the Germans' Vistula and East Prussian defenses in two large-scale operations. The lesser of these attacks, conducted by Cherniakhovsky's 3rd and Rokossovsky's 2nd Belorussian Fronts, performed the difficult task of clearing Army Group Center from East Prussia. While the former bulled its way westward through the German defenses towards Konigsberg, the latter, with a single tank army (the 5th Guards), enveloped East Prussia from the south and protected the 1st Belorussian Front's right flank. At the same time, Zhukov's 1st Belorussian and Konev's 1st Ukrainian Fronts, each spearheaded by two tank armies (the 1st and 2nd Guards and the 3rd and 4th Guards, respectively), conducted main offensive across Poland against German Army Group "A," to which Hitler had assigned responsibility for defending the vital Warsaw-Berlin axis.

Both offensives achieved immediate and spectacular success. After utterly shattering Army Group "A's" defenses opposite their bridgeheads, the 1st Belorussian and 1st Ukrainian Fronts' forces pushed aside German panzer reserves and raced westward with their four tank armies far in advance. The *Wehrmacht's* front in Poland vaporized, and by 1 February the lead elements of the 1st and 2nd Guards Tank Armies captured bridgeheads over the Oder River only 36 miles from Berlin. To the south, the 1st Ukrainian Front kept pace, reaching and crossing the Oder north and south of Breslau. In their wake thousands of *Wehrmacht* troops remained helplessly encircled in numerous pockets and bypassed cities and towns.

To the north, Rokossovsky's 2nd and Cherniakhovsky's 3rd Belorussian Fronts smashed Army Group Center's defenses in East Prussia and, by the end of January, isolated the remnants of the army group in a pocket around the city of Konigsberg. However, the 2nd Belorussian Front was not able to smash totally German defenses in the Danzig region of eastern Pomerania, leaving a sizable German force hanging threateningly over the 1st Belorussian Front's left flank. Given the twin threats posed to the 1st Belorussian Front by *Wehrmacht* forces in Pomerania and in Silesia to the south, on 2

February Stalin ordered Zhukov and Konev to halt their offensives until their flanks could be secured. Subsequently, the Red Army mounted four major and several minor offensives in February and March designed to clear *Wehrmacht* forces from Pomerania

Map 8. The Winter Campaign of 1945.



and Silesia. During this period, the 1st and 2nd Belorussian Fronts eliminated the threat in Silesia, and the 1st Ukrainian Front did the same in Silesia.

To the south in Hungary, from 6-15 March 1945, Hitler conducted his final offensive of the war by launching his Sixth SS Army in a dramatic but futile attempt to crush Red Army defenses west of Budapest and protect the vital Balaton oilfields. Just as this offensive faltered in mid-March, the Malinovsky's 2nd and Tolbukhin's 3rd Ukrainian Fronts launched another major offensive and several minor offensives against the depleted forces of Army Group South, driving them from Hungary and Slovakia and liberating Vienna on 13 April, only three days before the Red Army began its onslaught against Berlin.

Thus, the conventional view of military operations during the winter campaign of 1945 includes the following major operations.

- **The Soviet Vistula-Oder Offensive (12 January-3 February 1945)**
- **The Soviet East Prussian Offensive (13 January-25 April 1945)**
- **The Soviet Lower Silesian Offensive (8-24 February 1945)**
- **The Soviet East Pomeranian Offensive (10 February-4 April 1945)**
- **The Soviet Upper Silesian Offensive (15-31 March 1945)**
- **The Morava-Ostravka Offensives (10 March-5 May 1945)**
- **The Banska-Bystrica Offensive (10-30 March 1945)**
- **The German Balaton Offensive (6-15 March 1945)**
- **The Soviet Vienna Offensive (16 March-15 April 1945)**
- **The Bratislava-Brno Offensive (25 March-5 May 1945)**

The Forgotten War:

Because of the simple and straightforward design of the *Stavka's* strategic offensive plan, the short but violent Red Army winter campaign of 1945 holds few secrets. Characteristically, the two forgotten battles relate to operations the Red Army attempted to conduct during the course of or at the end of major successful offensives, in this case the Vistula-Oder and Vienna operations.

At a minimum, the forgotten operations during the winter campaign of 1945 include:

- **The Soviet Berlin Offensive (February 1945)**
- **The Soviet West Carpathian Offensive (10 March-5 May 1945)**

The first of these two forgotten battles relates to a Red Army offensive that never occurred, or more properly, an offensive that failed to achieve its stated objective and was later renamed to accord with the objective it actually achieved. In late January 1945, when it appeared that Zhukov's 1st Belorussian and Konev's 1st Ukrainian Fronts were about to reach the Oder River within striking distance of Berlin, Stalin ordered both *fronts* to prepare subsequent operations to capture Berlin. Contrary to existing Russian accounts that claim Stalin halted the *fronts'* Berlin offensive on 2 February, the 1st

Ukrainian Front began the operation only to abandon Berlin as an objective on 10 February. It remains unclear whether increased German resistance or a military or political decision by made Stalin prompted the abrupt end to the February offensive against Berlin. However, it is clear from Konev's and Rokossovsky's memoirs and those of several other army commanders that all disagreed vehemently with Stalin's decision to abort the Red Army's Berlin offensive.

The second forgotten operation was series of attempts by the *Stavka* to overcome continuing stiff resistance by the First Panzer Army in the western Carpathian Mountains of northern Slovakia, which still impeded communications between the 1st and 2nd Ukrainian Fronts operating in Poland and Hungary. In this offensive, (or series of offensives), the 60th and 38th Armies on the 1st Ukrainian Front's left wing attacked southward through Moravska-Ostrava in concert with the 1st Guards and 18th Armies of General A. I. Eremenko's 4th Ukrainian Front to link up with mobile forces of Malinovsky's 2nd Ukrainian Front, which were attacking northward from northern Hungary and, later, Bratislava and Brno. However, these offensives failed and the 1st Guards Cavalry-mechanized Group and the 6th Guards Tank Army, which took part in the northward thrust at various times, suffered heavy losses.

Reflections:

Red Army operations in late fall of 1944 had slashed away at Germany's strategic flanks and reached the Baltic coast and the Budapest region. *Wehrmacht* forces dispatched to meet the crisis on the flanks were barely able to stem the Soviet tide. Then, in less than two months, the Red Army commenced its most massive, violent, dramatic, and successful offensives of the war against German defenses in Poland and East Prussia, offensives that tore those defenses asunder. In less than one month, Red Army forces advanced up to 435 miles westward to the Oder River, reaching within only 36 miles of the eastern outskirts of Berlin.

In the process, the Red Army's offensives shattered and decimated Army Groups "A" and Center. After Hitler hastily dispatched reinforcements to the Oder River front to defend the approaches to Berlin, in February and March the Red Army once again struck the *Wehrmacht's* flanks, battering Army Group Vistula and consuming Army Group South's (and Germany's) remaining strategic reserves. By mid-April 1945, Red Army forces had reached the line of the Oder and Neisse Rivers on a broad front from Stettin in the north to Gorlitz on the Czech border and farther south to the outskirts of Graz, Austria and the Czech border north of Vienna. As had been the case in 1944, the baggage of these Soviet armies contained the nuclei of governments that would ensure Soviet political dominance over central and eastern Europe for decades to come.

These catastrophic defeats cost Germany much of the industry that had been dispersed in Poland to shield it from allied bombing. Soviet estimates that Germany lost 60 divisions, 1,300 tanks, and a similar number of aircraft are undoubtedly simplistic, since many small units survived and infiltrated elsewhere. Moreover, although German personnel losses in these operations were high (in excess of 660,000), replacements and transfers from other theaters caused German troop strength in the East to decline from

2,030,000 (with 190,000 allies) to just under 2,000,000 men at the end of March. However, 556,000 of these troops were isolated in Courland and East Prussia and virtually irrelevant to future operations. To make matters worse, the Soviets could now concentrate the bulk of its 6,461,000 troops on the most critical axis. For over a third of these forces, the next stop would be Berlin.

Historical Debates:

- The Red Army's February Halt along the Oder River

One of the most controversial issues in Russian military history concerns the wisdom of and motives for Stalin's decision to halt Red Army forces along the Oder River in early February 1945, thereby postponing the Red Army's climactic offensive against Berlin until 16 April 1945. Many senior Red Army military leaders such as former *front* commanders Konev and Rokossovsky later questioned Stalin's February decision. They argue that the Red Army could have seized the German capital in February without the bloody fight that it took to do so three months later. Others including Zhukov argue that Stalin's decision was prudent and correct.

In one respect, this debate reflected genuine conflicting interpretations of the military situation in February 1945. By the end of January, the 1st Belorussian and 1st Ukrainian Fronts' forces closed up to the Oder River along a 280-mile front from north of Kustrin southward to Ratibor and seized numerous bridgeheads across the river. On 26 and 27 January Zhukov and Konev submitted plans to the *Stavka* for the final thrust on Berlin. The proposed offensive called for the encirclement of the German capital and an advance by the 1st Ukrainian Front to the Elbe River by the end of February. Although weakened by three weeks of continuous operations, the two *fronts* still outnumbered opposing German forces more than threefold in infantry and over fivefold in tanks and artillery. Stalin approved Zhukov's and Konev's plans on 29 January and on 31 January the two commanders ordered their forces to begin the initial stage of the offensive between 4 and 8 February and capture Berlin by 15-16 February.

On about 8 February, Stalin suddenly cancelled the offensive during its initial stage on the grounds that Germans forces in Pomerania and Silesia threatened the attacking Soviet force. Later, other Russian critics cited the existence of encircled German forces to the rear and acute logistical shortages as additional reasons why Stalin postponed the Berlin offensive until April. Thereafter, instead of advancing on Berlin, Stalin ordered the two *fronts* to conduct operations in February and March to clear *Wehrmacht* forces from Pomerania and Silesia.

Still other historians have suggested three more reasons why Stalin postponed the February offensive on Berlin: first, his customary caution; second, his desire to avoid unnecessary casualties; and third, his wish to consolidate his hold over Poland before proceeding on the Berlin venture. Based on Stalin's past behavior, however, all three of these reasons ring hollow. Experience indicates that Stalin was seldom cautious in his conduct of the war and had pursued his strategic aims with little regard for excessive casualties. Instead, he routinely required the Red Army to advance further and for longer periods than it was actually capable of advancing. Furthermore, the 65-day delay in the

Red Army's Berlin offensive gave the Germans the opportunity to mass their dwindling forces and strengthen their defenses east of Berlin. Predictably, this guaranteed massive Red Army casualties in the April offensive. Finally, in January 1945 NKVD forces were already actively consolidating the Soviet Union's hold over Poland.

Therefore, as indicated below, the most likely reasons why Stalin halted the Berlin offensive were probably political in nature.

- Stalin's Strategic Intent

At the end of January 1945, Red Army forces had occupied Rumania, Bulgaria, virtually all of pre-war Poland, most of Slovakia, and all of Hungary westward to Budapest and Lake Balaton. Therefore, the Soviet Union exercised military and, hence, political control over all of the countries subject to mutual agreements negotiated with its U.S. and British allies except the Czech State. Furthermore, Red Army troops were situated on the northern border of Czechoslovakia and only 36-miles from Berlin, capable of entering those regions with impunity at any time they wished, while Allied forces were still situated along the Rhine River far away from Berlin.

At this juncture, Stalin adhered to the same strategy he had relentlessly pursued since late 1943, when he had aggressively pushed Red Army forces into the Ukraine, and from August through October 1944, when he had ordered Red Army forces to invade Rumania and later advance into Hungary, at a time when its forces stood relatively idly by on the Warsaw-Berlin axis. In early February 1945, after he orchestrated the necessary political justification, Stalin ordered the Red Army to occupy the remainder of the Danube River basin by seizing Bratislava and Vienna. He justified his actions, which took place literally during the Yalta Conference (7-12 February), on the basis of his earlier (October 1944) suggestions that the Allies avoid a bloody battle for Berlin by joining the Red Army in an offensive via Switzerland to destroy *Wehrmacht* forces in southern Germany.

When the Allies demurred, as he knew they would, Stalin orchestrated an offensive on his own deeper into the Danube basin region. After halting his forces along the Oder River and short of Berlin on 8 February, on 17 February, the very day the Yalta Conference ended, he ordered Malinovsky's 2nd and Tolbukhin's 3rd Ukrainian Fronts to launch an offensive on 15 March to defeat German forces in Hungary, capture Brno and Vienna by 4 April, and, thereafter, advance on Pilsen. The same day, he ordered Eremenko's 4th Ukrainian Front to conduct an offensive beginning on 10 March to seize the Moravska-Ostrava industrial region in Czechoslovakia and subsequently advance to capture Prague by 21-26 April 1945. Prior to the offensive, Stalin reinforced the 2nd Ukrainian Front with the fresh and powerful 9th Guards Army and ordered Malinovsky to employ the army as a shock group only in an offensive role.

Even though Hitler mounted his last major offensive of the war in the Lake Balaton region from 6-15 March, this offensive failed to thwart Stalin's planned Vienna offensive. After halting the *Wehrmacht's* thrust at Lake Balaton, on 18 March the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts began their Vienna offensive, drove German forces from Hungary, invaded eastern Austria [then the German Ostmark], and occupied Vienna on 13 April.

Three days later, Zhukov's and Konev's *fronts* finally began their climactic assault on Berlin.

Clearly, political considerations impelled Stalin to halting the Red Army's February offensive short of Berlin. Previous agreements that Stalin reached with his Allies prior to April 1945 concerned the relative postwar political influence of each party in Poland, Rumania, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia and the division of Germany into occupation sectors. However, these agreements said virtually nothing about the fate of Austria. By virtue of his southward diversion from February through mid-April, Stalin occupied eastern Austria and the vital city of Vienna as valuable bargaining chips for subsequent postwar negotiations with his Allies. Soviet troops would not leave the region until 1954, one year after Stalin died.

THE SPRING CAMPAIGN, APRIL-MAY 1945

Context:

A COMPARATIVE CHRONOLOGY OF OPERATIONS ON THE EASTERN AND WESTERN FRONTS DURING THE SPRING CAMPAIGN OF 1945

- **On 18 April 1945, Allied forces reached the Elbe River, 60 miles from Berlin but halted in accordance with Allied agreements. Allied strength in the West totaled 4 million men and 85 divisions.**
- **From 16 April-7 May 1945, over 2 million Red Army troops conducted the Berlin and Prague offensives at a cost of 413,865 casualties, including 93,113 dead or missing, which equaled 25 % of the United States military's entire wartime death toll.**

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- **By war's end, out of the 13.5 million men Hitler's *Wehrmacht* fielded in the war, 10.8 million had perished or fallen captive in the East. In April 1945, it was no mere coincidence that the Allies let the Russians take Berlin. The Russians paid for the right to do so by their blood.**

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- **At war's end, U.S. Army strength reached 8.3 million men and 89 divisions, including 16 armored and 5 airborne. U.S. strength in Europe reached 3 million men.**
- **At war's end, Red Army strength in Europe totaled roughly 6.4 million soldiers and 500 divisions.**

The Conventional View:

After more than three years of enormous destruction and unimaginable casualties, the *Stavka* was determined to destroy the Nazi regime and end the terrible war in the spring of 1945. Furthermore, after expending so much blood and energy to defeat the *Wehrmacht* in the field, Stalin was unwilling to permit the western allies to seize the final victory. Quite apart from his desire to dominate postwar Central Europe and the Allied agreement that the Soviets should seize the city, this emotional preoccupation drove the Red Army forward toward Berlin.

During the war's final campaign, the Red Army faced the equally determined and desperate remnants of the once proud but now decimated *Wehrmacht*, a force of about 1.6 million men under Army Groups Vistula and Center, which manned deeper than usual defenses along the Oder and Neisse Rivers and the Czech border. Leaving only limited forces to face the British, Americans, Canadians, and French in the West, Hitler's High Command assembled roughly 85 divisions and numerous smaller, separate units totaling as many as 1 million men and boys and 850 tanks to wage the final struggle along the

Oder River. An even greater challenge to the Red Army during the spring campaign was the fact that, for the first time in the war, it had only limited room to maneuver. With the large city of Berlin only 36 miles to their front and with the forward lines of their Allies only 62 miles beyond, the Soviets faced the unwelcome prospect of having to conduct repeated penetration attacks against successive, fully-manned, defensive lines anchored on increasingly urbanized terrain.

Therefore, the *Stavka* prepared and conducted its spring campaign with immense care. Deep down, Stalin was also unsure of how many Germans in the West would join their comrades along the Oder to face the more dreaded and feared Red Army. Experience had demonstrated that a force of up to 1 million men could offer credible resistance along a formidable river barrier, even against a force more than twice its size. Thus, the Soviets embarked on preparing an offensive fitting to the task – an offensive whose conduct would warrant credit in the eyes of her Allies who were approaching Berlin from the west.

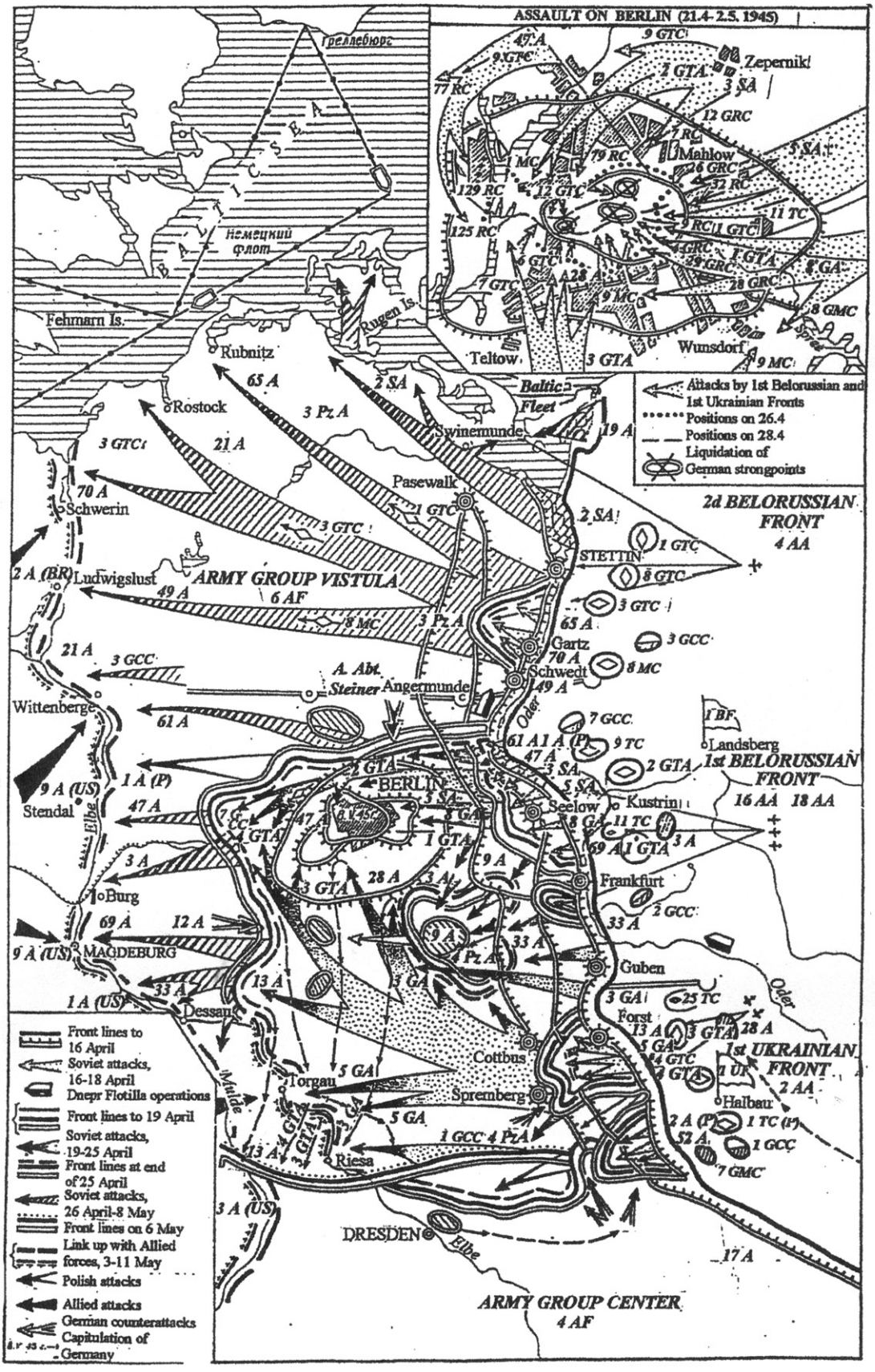
In accordance with the *Stavka's* strategic plan for the spring campaign, the Red Army dealt first with Army Group Vistula defending Berlin and only then engaged Army Group Center in Czechoslovakia. The Red Army's objectives were limited to those boundaries that had already been mutually agreed upon with the Allies. Three reinforced *fronts* took part in the Berlin offensive (See Map 9). Zhukov's 1st Belorussian Front attacked directly toward Berlin from the Kustrin bridgehead on the western bank of the Oder River to envelop the city from the north, Konev's 1st Ukrainian Front thrust across the Oder to the south to envelop Berlin from the southwest, and, to the north, Rokossovsky's 3rd Belorussian Front attacked across the Oder several days later to destroy German in the coastal plain north of Berlin and link up with Allied forces along the Elbe River. The ensuing struggle, in particular, the advance by Zhukov's *front* into Berlin proper was prolonged and bloody, but ended on 7 and 8 May when Red Army forces linked up with Allied forces along the Elbe River and *Wehrmacht* forces in Germany capitulated. During the course of the Berlin operation, Red Army forces crushed the remnants of Army Group Vistula and captured 480,000 German troops. The cost, however, had been great as 361,367 Soviet and Polish soldiers fell in the effort.

While three Red Army *fronts* conducted the climactic Berlin offensive, other Red Army forces completed the liberation of Austria and liquidated resisting pockets of German forces in Courland and on the Samland Peninsula, west of Konigsberg. The 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts liberated Vienna from Army Group South, captured Brno, Czechoslovakia and approached Graz, Austria. The 1st and 2nd Baltic Fronts destroyed the remnants of Army Group North (renamed Army Group Courland on 26 January) in Courland, seizing up to 100,000 prisoners. Finally, and the 3rd Belorussian Front liquidated the remaining forces of former Army Group Center (renamed Operational Group Samland) in the Samland pocket west of Konigsberg, taking another 189,000 prisoners.

As early as 1 May, the *Stavka* ordered Zhukov's 1st Belorussian Front to relieve all elements of Konev's 1st Ukrainian Front engaged in mopping up in Berlin so that Konev's forces could turn southwestward and, in conjunction with the Malinovsky's 2nd

and Eremenko's 4th Ukrainian Fronts, advance on Prague against the Red Army's old nemesis, Army Group Center, whose 600,000 men awaited inevitable destruction, ironically, not in Germany, but in Czechoslovakia, which had been one of Hitler's initial victims.

Map 9. The Berlin Operation.



The Berlin operation (16 April-8 May 1945)

While the Reichstag was still under assault, between 1 and 6 May, the 1st, 4th, and 2nd Ukrainian Fronts regrouped their forces and began their rapid advance toward Prague (See Map 10). The combined force of over 2 million Soviet and Polish soldiers relied heavily on tank forces, including three tank armies and a cavalry-mechanized group, to spearhead a rapid thrust directly on the Czech capital. According to the hastily formulated plan, the 1st Ukrainian Front attacked west of Dresden, penetrate the Erzgeberg Mountain passes in southern east Germany, and committed two tank armies (the 3rd Guards and 4th Guards) in the rapid dash to Prague. Polish and Soviet forces under the 1st Ukrainian Front's control launched a supporting attack in the Gorlitz sector, and simultaneously, the 2nd and 4th Ukrainian Fronts launched tank-heavy offensives toward Prague in a wide arc spanning the eastern and southern frontiers of Czechoslovakia.

The forward detachments of the 1st Ukrainian Front's 3rd and 4th Guards Tank Armies captured Prague on 9 May. During the following two days, Red Army forces accepted the surrender of more than 600,000 German troops of Army Group Center. On 11 May the lead elements of the 4th Guards Tank Army linked up with the Third U.S. Army east of Pilsen, ending the major wartime field operations of the Red Army.

Traditionally, major operations during the spring campaign include:

- **The Siege of Konigsberg and adjacent pockets (13 March-9 April 1945)**
- **The Battle for Berlin (16 April-8 May 1945)**
- **The Prague Offensive (6-11 May 1945)**

The Forgotten War:

Little remains to be revealed regarding the Red Army's climactic offensives of April and May 1945, which the crushed the remnants of the *Wehrmacht* in Berlin and ended Hitler's thousand year Reich in only 12 years. By this time, the theater of military operations had shrunken to such an extent that, while offensive operations sometimes involved difficult and costly fighting, they were limited in scope and duration by virtue of the territory German forces actually held and by agreements with other Allied governments over the physical limits of those operations. Hence, these offensive operations were largely transparent.

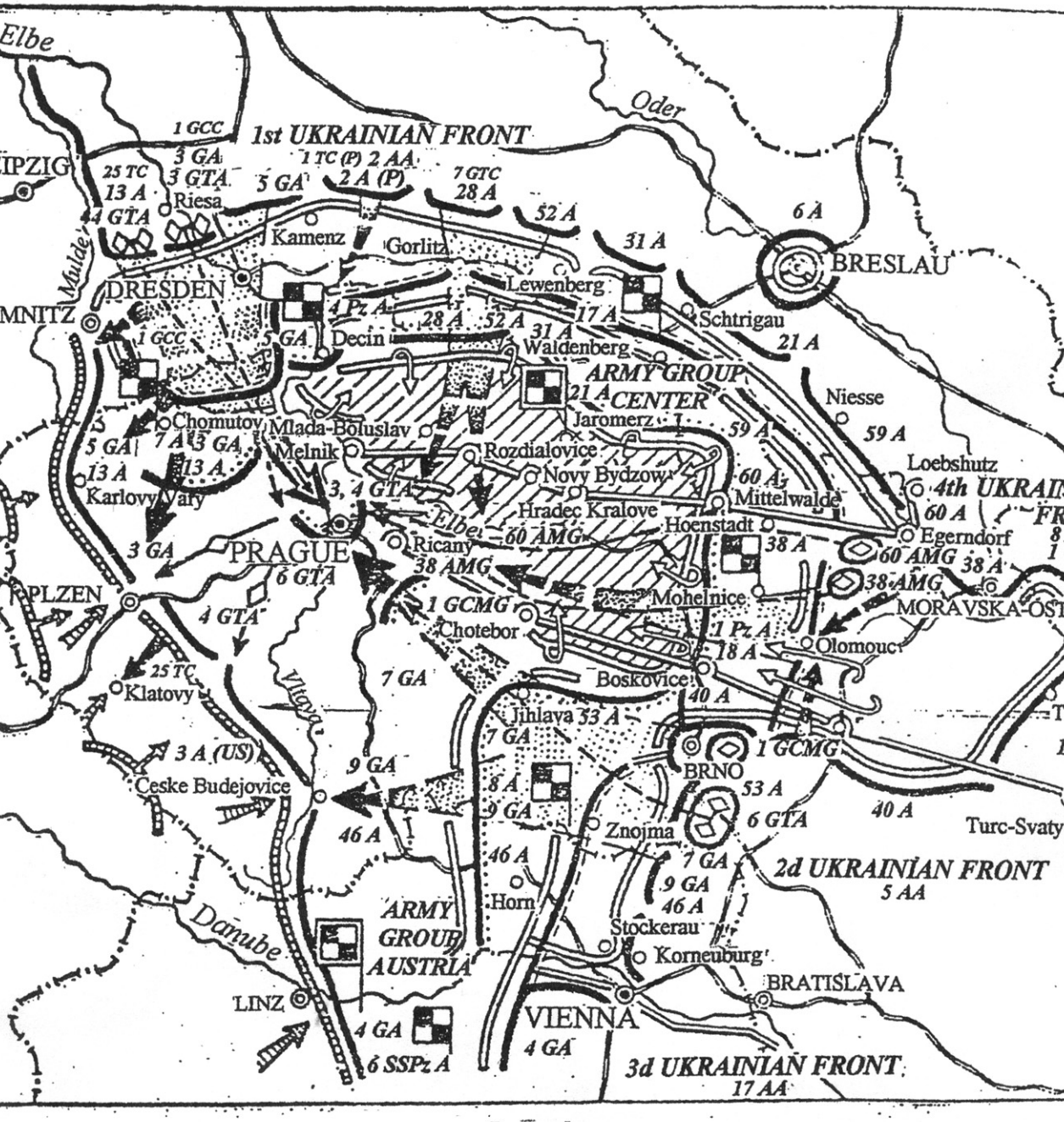
Nevertheless, even during this period, the details of the fighting that took place during these final wartime operations remain quite obscure, largely because these operations took place during the dramatic Berlin offensive. Neglected battles during the spring campaign include:

- **The Battle for Courland (16 February-8 May 1945)**

The Red Army's 1st and 2nd Baltic Fronts isolated a large portion of German Army Group North in the Courland peninsula in October 1944 and besieged this German force until its surrender on 9 May 1945. On 1 April 1945, the 2nd Baltic Front's forces, which were responsible for conducting the siege, were renamed the Leningrad Front's

Courland Group of Forces. Although Russian histories cover the siege in general terms, these accounts fall far short of revealing the heavy fighting that took place as Red Army forces

Map 10. The Prague Operation.



Legend

Positions on 5 May

Positions late on 8 May

Positions late on 9 May

Positions on late 11 May

Soviet operational concept

AMG= Army mobile group

The Prague operation (6-11 May 1945)

attempted to reduce the pocket. According to German records, these offensives took place in October 1944, immediately after German forces were isolated in the region, from 20-24 November and 21-22 December 1944, and in late February and mid-March 1945.

Reflections:

The *Stavka* and its subordinate operating *fronts* prepared the Berlin operation in a relatively short period and achieved it principal aims – the encirclement and destruction of the German Berlin grouping and the capture of Berlin – in 17 days. The Soviets have since considered the operation to be a classic example of an offensive by a group of *fronts* conducted with decisive aims in an almost ceremonial fashion. The nearly simultaneous offensive by three *fronts* in a 186-mile sector with the delivery of six blows tied down German reserves, disorganized German command and control, and, in some instances, achieved operational and tactical surprise. The Berlin operation – in particular the poor performance of Zhukov's 1st Belorussian Front – was instructive in other ways as well. Its nature and course were markedly different from the heavy combat the Red Army had experienced on the more open terrain further east. Combat in the more heavily urban and wooded terrain near Berlin exacted a far more costly toll on the attackers than Soviet planners had anticipated. These experiences and lessons would form the basis for Soviet postwar restructuring of their armed forces.

The military consequences of operations in the spring of 1945 were clear. The remaining forces of the once proud and seemingly indestructible armies of Germany were crushed by the combined efforts of Allied forces assaulting from east and west. Nazi Germany, which had based its power and built its empire on the foundations of warfare of unprecedented violence and destructiveness, was felled in equally violent and decisive fashion. The colossal scope and scale of the Berlin operation, with the appalling Soviet casualties and equally massive destruction of the German capital, was a fitting end to a war, which was so unlike previous wars. As more than one German veteran observed, war in the West was proper sport, while war in the East was unmitigated horror. This final horror eliminated the remaining two million men of the *Wehrmacht* and reduced Germany to ashes.

The political consequences of these last operations reflected a process, which had been going on for over a year, which the Soviet Union's Allies had largely overlooked or tolerated in their search for victory. That process now became crystal clear during the peace that followed. In the baggage of the victorious Red Army came political power in the guise of newly formed national armies for Soviet liberated states and governments to go with those armies. Two Polish, three Rumanian, and two Bulgarian armies fought and bled alongside the Red Army, together with a Czech Corps and other smaller national formations. Once returned to their liberated lands, these units cooperated with local partisan formations, many also sponsored and equipped by the Soviet Union. Under the protection of the Red Army, these armed forces and the governments-in-exile that accompanied them, quickly transformed military into political power.

Slowly, in mid-May 1945, the firing died out and the war in Europe gradually came to an end. Having captured Bucharest, Belgrade, Warsaw, Budapest, Vienna, Berlin,

and Prague from the shattered *Wehrmacht*, the Red Army, by rights, had undisputed claim to the lion's share of fighting and bleeding for this victory over Nazi Germany. In Western perceptions, however, the political consequences of that victory soon deprived them of that right. Within a few short years, the horrors of war were replaced by the menace of the Cold War, and Cold War suspicions soon obscured the unprecedented suffering and triumph of the Soviet peoples.

Historical Debates:

- The Race for Berlin

On 16 April Zhukov's 1st Belorussian Front and Konev's 1st Ukrainian Front began their assault on Berlin, joined shortly thereafter by Rokossovsky's 3rd Belorussian Front. While Zhukov's assault bogged down in heavy fighting for possession of the heavily defended Seelow Heights and turned into a slow and costly slugfest along the eastern approaches to the city, Konev's forces encircled Army Group Vistula's Ninth Army south of Berlin and made far more rapid progress. Ultimately, Stalin rewarded Konev for his performance by permitting his forces to take part in the liberation of the city. Since war's end, debate has raged among Russian historians regarding the relative performance of Zhukov and Konev in the battle and the contest between the two over the honor of capturing the city. Apparently, this contest resulted in several nasty but as yet unconfirmed incidents, including one occasion when Zhukov authorized his artillery to fire on Konev's advanced formations. Whether or not these reported incidents were apocryphal, they are persistent enough to warrant further study and analysis.

- Target Prague

While similar debates exist within Russian historical circles regarding the Red Army's advance to Prague, particularly regarding the specific role each attacking force played in the offensive, the most interesting issue is the simultaneous advance of Patton's Third U.S. Army to Pilsen. Here, however, the debate takes place in the clear context of Allied agreements stating the Red Army forces would liberate Czechoslovakia, agreements to which all parties ultimately adhered.

CONCLUSIONS

This brief survey of the Soviet-German War and its relationship to the war in the West highlights the existing gaps in the historical record of the war and identifies some of the many salient and controversial issues that arose during its course. Most of these gaps involve Red Army operations simply because it was primarily Russian historians who wrote the history of their Great Patriotic War. The historical debates identified concern only a selection of those many controversial issues that arose from the conduct and course of the war.

Above and beyond the issues surfaced in this paper, three over-arching matters remain to be treated. In brief, these issues regard the relative contributions of the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union to Allied victory in Europe, the role of the "second front" in the achievement that victory, and the impact of Allied Lend-Lease on the ability of the Red Army to wage war. All three of these issues were important during the course of the war, all three have remained contentious since war's end, and the continuing debates over all three will likely effect U.S. Russian relations far into the future. This alone makes a brief discussion of those issues essential.

Relative Contributions to Victory:

On the 50th anniversary of the Normandy invasion of 1944, a U.S. news magazine featured a cover photo of General Dwight D. Eisenhower, who was labeled as the man who defeated Hitler. If any one man deserved that label, it was not Eisenhower but Zhukov, Vasilevsky, or possibly Stalin himself. More generally, the Red Army and the Soviet citizenry of many nationalities bore the lion's share of the struggle against Germany from 1941 to 1945. Only China, which suffered almost continuous Japanese attack from 1931 onward, matched the level of Soviet suffering and effort. In military terms, moreover, the Chinese participation in the war was almost insignificant in comparison with the Soviet war, which constantly engaged absorbed more than half of all German forces.

From June through December 1941, only Britain shared with the Soviet Union the trials of war against the Germans. Over 3 million German troops fought in the East, while 900,000 struggled elsewhere, attended to occupied Europe, or rested in the homeland. From December 1941 through November 1942, while over nine million troops on both sides struggled in the East, the only significant ground action in the Western Theater took place in North Africa, where relatively small British forces engaged Rommel's Afrika Corps and its Italian allies.

In October and November 1942, the British celebrated victory over the Germans at El Alamein, defeating four German divisions and a somewhat larger Italian force, and inflicting 60,000 axis losses. The same month, at Stalingrad, the Soviets defeated and encircled German Sixth Army, damaged Fourth Panzer Army, and smashed Rumanian

Third and Fourth Armies, eradicating over 50 divisions and over 300,000 men from the Axis order of battle. By May 1943 the Allies pursued Rommel's Afrika Corps across northern Africa and into Tunisia, where after heavy fighting, the German and Italian force of 250,000 surrendered. Meanwhile, in the East, another German army (the Second) was severely mauled, and Italian Eighth and Hungarian Second Armies were utterly destroyed, exceeding Axis losses in Tunisia.

While over 3.5 million German and Soviet troops struggled at Kursk and 8.5 million later fought on a 1,500-mile front from the Leningrad region to the Black Sea coast, in July 1943 Allied forces invaded Sicily, and drove 60,000 Germans from the island. In August the Allies landed on the Italian peninsula. By October, when 2.5 million men of the Wehrmacht faced 6.6 million Soviets, the frontlines had stabilized in Italy south of Rome as the Germans deployed a much smaller, although significant, number of troops to halt the Allied advance.

By 1 October 1943, 2,565,000 men (63%) of the Wehrmacht's 4,090,000-man force struggled in the East, together with the bulk of the 300,000 *Waffen* SS troops. On 1 June 1944, 239 (62%) of the German Army's 386 division equivalents fought in the East. With operations in Italy at a stalemate, until June 1944, in fact, the Wehrmacht still considered the west as a semi-reserve. In August 1944, after the opening of the second front, while 2.1 million Germans fought in the East, 1 million opposed Allied operations in France.

Casualty figures underscore this reality. From September 1939 to September 1942, the bulk of the German Army's 922,000 dead, missing, and disabled (14% of the total force) could be credited to combat in the East. Between 1 September 1942 and 20 November 1943 this grim count rose to 2,077,000 (30% of the total force), again primarily in the East. From June through November 1944, after the opening of the second front, the German Army suffered another 1,457,000 irrevocable losses. Of this number, 903,000 (62%) were lost in the East. Finally, after losing 120,000 men to the Allies in the Battle of the Bulge, from 1 January to 30 April 1945 the Germans suffered another 2 million losses, two-thirds at Soviet hands. Today, the stark inscription, "died in the East," that is carved on countless thousands of headstones in scores of German cemeteries bear mute witness to the carnage in the East, where the will and strength of the Wehrmacht perished.

The Role of the "Second Front" in Allied Victory:

During the war and since war's end, the Soviets have bitterly complained since the war about the absence of a real "second front" before June 1944, and that issue remains a source of suspicion even in post Cold War Russia. Yet, Allied reasons for deferring a second front until 1944 were valid, and Allied contributions to victories were significant. As the American debacle at the Kasserine Pass in December 1942 and Canadian performance at Dieppe in 1943 indicated, Allied armies were not ready to operate in France in 1943, even had a sufficient number of landing craft been available for the invasion, which they were not. Even in 1944 Allied success at Normandy was a close thing and depended, in part, on major German misperceptions and mistakes. Once in

France, after the breakout from the Normandy bridgehead in August, the 2 million Allied troops in France inflicted grievous losses on the 1 million defending Germans, 100,000 at Falaise, and a total of 400,000 by December 1944. In the subsequent battle of the Bulge (16 December 1944-31 January 1945), the Germans lost another 120,000 men. These losses in the West, combined with the over 1.2 million lost in the East during the same period, broke the back of the *Wehrmacht* and set the context for the final destruction of Germany in 1945.

In addition to its ground combat contribution, the Allies conducted a major strategic bombing campaign against Germany (which the Soviets could not mount) and in 1944 drew against themselves the bulk of German operational and tactical airpower. The strategic bombing campaign did significant damage to German industrial targets, struck hard at the well-being and morale of the German civil population, and sucked into its vortex and destroyed a large part of the German fighter force, which had earlier been used effectively in a ground role in the East. Although airpower did not prove to be a war-winning weapon, and German industrial mobilization and weapons production peaked in late 1944, the air campaign seriously hindered the German war effort.

Equally disastrous for the Germans were the losses of tactical fighters in that campaign and in combat in France in 1944. So devastating were these losses that after mid-1944 the German air force was no longer a factor on the Eastern Front.

The Role of Lend-Lease in Allied Victory:

Another controversial Allied contribution to the war effort was the Lend-Lease program of aid to the Soviet Union. Although Soviet accounts have routinely belittled the significance of Lend-Lease in sustaining the Soviet war effort, the overall importance of this assistance cannot be understated. Lend-Lease aid did not arrive in sufficient quantities to make the difference between defeat and victory in 1941-42; that achievement must be attributed solely to the Soviet people and to the iron nerve of Stalin, Zhukov, Shaposhnikov, Vasilevsky, and their subordinates. As the war continued, however, the United States and Great Britain provided many of the implements of war and strategic raw materials necessary for Soviet victory (Se Figure 7).

Figure 7. Lend-Lease Assistance to the Soviet Union

	Lend-Lease	Domestic Production
Armored vehicles	12,161 (12 %)	98,300
	(7,056 US)	
Guns and mortars	9,600 (2 %)	525,200
Machine guns	131,600	
Combat aircraft	18,303 (15 %)	122,100
Fighters	13,857	
Bombers	3,633	
Transport	710	
Reconnaissance	19	
Training	84	
Aircraft engines	14,902 (6.7 %)	222,418
Trucks and Jeeps	409,526 (55 %)	744,400
(reached Russia)	312,600 (42 %)	
Explosives (tons)	325,784	
Locomotives	1,860 (6.3 %)	29,524
Rail cars	11,181	
Field telephones	422,000	
Foodstuffs (tons)	4,281,910 (25 %)	17,127,640
Oil (POL) (tons)	2,599,000	
Boots	15,000,000 pairs	

Without Lend-Lease food, clothing, and raw materials (especially metals), the Soviet economy would have been even more heavily burdened by the war effort. Perhaps most directly, without Lend-Lease trucks, rail engines, and railroad cars, every Soviet offensive would have stalled at an earlier stage, outrunning its logistical tail in a matter of days. In turn, this would have allowed the German commanders to escape at least some encirclements, while forcing the Red Army to prepare and conduct many more deliberate penetration attacks in order to advance the same distance. Left to their own devices, Stalin and his commanders might have taken 12 to 18 months longer to finish off the Wehrmacht; the ultimate result would probably have been the same, except that Soviet soldiers could have waded at France's Atlantic beaches. Thus, while the Red Army shed the bulk of Allied blood, it would have shed more blood for longer without Allied assistance.

Finally, while this paper identifies numerous forgotten battles and contentious issues, it is by no means definitive. Further investigation will no doubt surface many other examples of each. To do so will require immense by many historians in both Russia and the West.

APPENDIX 1:

THE PROCESS OF IDENTIFYING FORGOTTEN BATTLES

For a number of reasons, the detection and analysis of ignored or neglected military operations that occurred during the Soviet-German War, is a difficult and painstaking process. First, general accounts of the war written by Soviet historians often have simply overlooked these operations, treated them as insignificant, or dismissed them, rightly or wrongly as feints, demonstrations, or deception operations. Second, since many of these operations failed, they left no major "footprint" in terms of major territorial advance or noticeable impact on their opponent that can easily attract the attention of historians. Finally, since the *Wehrmacht* routinely assumed that massive Red Army forces were arrayed against them, noted almost constant Soviet offensive action against them, and experienced difficulty in distinguishing precisely what Red Army forces were operating against them and why (because of the rapidity of their advance earlier in the war and their decaying intelligence capabilities late in the war), histories based on German sources have focused primarily on only major operations that their Russian counterparts identified and described.

Although it is a painstaking and difficult process, identifying the gaps in the historical record of the war is absolutely vital because those gaps encompasses upwards of 40 percent of the Red Army's wartime operations. Therefore, historians cannot prepare any comprehensive accounts or assessments of the war or reach valid conclusions regarding its conduct until those gaps have been identified and filled.

Thus, the gaps this survey identifies have been routinely subsumed within and obscured by larger-scale operations, such as the Barbarossa advance, the Battles of Moscow, Stalingrad, and Kursk, and the immense operations the Red Army conducted later in the war (for example, the advance to the Dnepr, operations on the Right Bank of the Ukraine, and the Belorussian operation). Finally, many of the gaps identified here occurred during the waning stages of major known Red Army offensives, when the magnitude of Red Army offensive success combined with German confusion to obscure this fresh Red Army activity and ultimate *Stavka* offensive aims.

If historians failed to note and write about these operations or if they summarily dismissed these operations as unimportant, how then can historian identify these gaps in the operational record of the war? Further, how can historians identify Soviet intentions when they conducted these operations? Based on my experience, they can do so in two ways. First, they can exploit Russian-language studies written during periods of greater candor, when political authorities permitted more thorough and candid coverage of the war. The most productive of these periods occurred from 1958 to the mid-1960s, when Khrushchev permitted and even encouraged greater candor and more detailed coverage of wartime operations in memoirs, unit histories, and other operational studies. For example, during this period Khrushchev permitted historians to reveal details of some of the Red Army's greatest wartime military debacles, such as the May 1942 disaster at

Khar'kov and the defeats in the Donbas and at Khar'kov in February and March 1943. A second period of candor began in the mid-1980s when Gorbachev began his program of *glasnost'*.

Even if forgotten battles did not receive requisite attention during those periods of greater candor, some received mention, albeit fragmentary and with proper context in some of the more thorough memoirs and unit histories, such as M. D. Solomatin's history of the 1st Mechanized Corps. However, while historians can reconstruct the shadowy outlines of these forgotten battles on the basis of these Russian works and German military archival materials, full reconstruction was not possible without additional sources. Today many, but by no means all, of these critical Russian sources are finally available. However, it is interesting to note that many of the newly-released Russian archival materials, in particular the processed war experience volumes of the General Staff and a multitude of studies prepared by the Voroshilov Academy of the General Staff and the Frunze Academy also often ignore the gaps in the historical record, probably for political reasons.

These weaknesses in both official and unofficial Russian military sources force historians to turn elsewhere if they are to identify the many gaps in the record of the war and reconstruct a more complete history of wartime operations. The first place, they can turn is to the vast repository of German archival materials on the war, supplemented by the numerous published German unit histories. German archival materials on the Wehrmacht's operations in the East have remained woefully under exploited. The now famous German military leaders who introduced the Soviet-German War to Western audiences (such as Heinz Guderian, F. W. von Mellenthin, and Erich von Manstein) wrote their memoirs from their personal notes without the benefit of archival materials. Therefore, their accounts are far from complete regarding Red Army actions and intent; and present the Red Army as an utterly faceless force. While they touch upon many of gaps highlighted here, the events subsumed within the context of larger operations. Therefore, it is understandable that most histories of the war written by Western historians that rely heavily on these German memoirs also miss these gaps and focus primarily on only that portion of the war record that German sources have identified as significant.

The weaknesses of German memoir literature and the secondary accounts based on them force the historian to seek other sources, the most important of which are the records of Wehrmacht formations in the German archives. Although archival records of single formations are narrowly focused in terms of time and geography, careful study of them can produce positive results, particularly if the historian can identify the gap by other means. I have employed a time- consuming and painstaking manual but fruitful method for discovering forgotten battles and neglected operations. This involves studying the daily operational and graphic materials in force daily records of ongoing military operations.

For example, the most accurate, vivid, and candid portrayals of what took place on the field of battle appear in the daily operational and intelligence maps of German army groups, armies, panzer groups and armies, army and panzer corps, and infantry,

motorized [panzer-grenadier], and panzer divisions. These "pictures" of combat record the nature and intensity of combat in associated sectors of the front by means of changing front-line traces and visually reveal the intensity and scope of fighting in any region by means of the physical configuration of the front and the associated intelligence picture of concentrated and identified enemy forces. When supplemented by accompanying written operational and intelligence reports and other documents, large- and even small-scale Red Army operations become readily identifiable and subject to at least rudimentary analysis.

I have identified the forgotten battles covered in this survey through this laborious process of observing and studying German daily operational and intelligence maps. Once historians have identified these operations and battles by this simple method, they can employ other German and Russian sources, however, fragmentary, to confirm, elucidate, and elaborate upon the existence, nature, and probable intent of these obscure, but often significant operations. While this technique is by no means infallible, it has proved itself a reliable tool for detecting major forgotten battles, accurately measuring the nature, intensity, and scope of the forgotten operations, and identifying the contending participants. This technique cannot, however, determine precisely the ultimate intent of the battle or operation. Therefore, definitive judgments regarding these and other neglected operations can be reached only after the Russian military archives are fully open and accessible to Western and Russian scholars alike. In the meantime, this analytical technique and the results it achieves serves as an excellent method for encouraging those archive doors to swing open.

Finally, the forgotten battles and historical debates covered by this survey represent only a modest beginning in the process of understanding what occurred in this most terrible of wars and why.

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